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PARABLES FOR

OUR TIMES

CALKINS

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PARABLES FOR OUR TIMES.

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PARABLES FOR OUR TIMES.

**A Study of Present-Day Questions
in the Light of
Christ's Illustrations.**

By Wolcott Calkins, D.D.



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PARABLES FOR OUR TIMES.

CHAPTER I.

**THE GENERAL APPLICATION OF ALL THE
PARABLES OF CHRIST TO OUR TIMES;
THE PARABLES CLASSIFIED.**

And so the Word had breath, and wrought
With human hands the creed of creeds
In loveliness of perfect deeds.

TENNYSON.

THREE clusters of parables are as radiant among the heavenly words of our Lord as the signs of the Zodiac in the firmament above. After the Sermon on the Mount He continued to teach in the same way, with few illustrations, until the autumn of His first year in Galilee. Then He began to use parables more freely. Only a few of them are recorded, for at this time He never taught the people at all without a parable. It is evident that He told stories by the

hour without pausing to explain them. This excited wonder, and His disciples asked why He had made such a change in His method of teaching. His explanation brings out the fact that the change was in the minds of the people who were listening to Him. Immense multitudes had followed Him, and no opposition had been made of a serious nature. Suddenly, the Pharisees began to be jealous, the enthusiasm of the crowds was subsiding, and the test must be applied to which He subjects all His followers in every age. The Gospel which all were so ready to accept proves to be a sifting of character and a call to self-denial : You have all heard My word, but some have not understood it at all ; some will stumble as soon as tribulation and persecution arise ; in some it will be choked by the cares of this lifetime and the deceitfulness of riches. It will bear fruit only in those who receive it in good and honest hearts.

These parables may have been given on different occasions, but they

are grouped together here to illustrate in general the fundamental truths of the Gospel: the fruitfulness of its teaching, **THE SOWER**; the value of human nature, **THE TREASURE** and **THE PEARL**; and finally, the judgment at frequent intervals to protect the truth from adulteration, **THE TARES** and **THE NET**. In this threefold classification of the first group, **THE LEAVEN** has been ranged with **THE SOWER** in the traditional interpretation. If this be correct it is the only instance in the New Testament in which the word leaven is used in a good sense. Probably it means exactly the same as the tares, a principle of evil which works in secret. The fire of the oven must arrest its fermentation. So the **LEAVEN** ought to take its place between the **TARES** and the **NET** as a parable of the judgment.

The second cluster of parables in chronological order appears in the record of the last six months of the Lord's teaching. He had just re-

turned from the winter festival in Jerusalem, where He was rejected and threatened with stoning. The people of Galilee were alarmed by this official repudiation of His claim to be the Messiah, and they were also forsaking Him. He was driven from His home, and it was only for these few months of flight from persecution that He had not where to lay His head. Then the publicans and sinners began to come to Him. He had come to them before. He had made one of the chief publicans an apostle, who had spread a great feast and had invited His associates in the revenue department to meet his Master. But they were shy of Him; His followers were the people who despised and hated them for their extortions and for their sycophancy to the Roman power. And the sinners were the outcasts of all classes. Even Jesus, who had been healing and blessing the poor for years, had been habitually in company too respectable for publicans and sinners. This was their chance; all

the world had left Him to them. With a sudden flame of hope and relief they began to flock to Him from every place. For the first time, and henceforth to the last week of His sufferings, the multitudes who were hanging on His words were tax-gatherers and profligates.

And now there was nothing in the Gospel of the Blessed God too good for them. THE LOST SHEEP, THE LOST COIN AND THE LOST SON; THE GOOD SAMARITAN; THE DEBTOR FORGIVEN MOST; THE WIDOW AND HER JUDGE; THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN; these were some of the visible stars of this cluster. And the rest, which were not reported, were also, no doubt, stories of the endless love of God to sinful men. If a note of severity was heard, it was addressed to a surly brother, or to priests and Levites who passed by on the other side, or to the rulers who neglected or to the Pharisees who despised the penitent. Jesus loved them, and His — winning parables to them are the gems of His gospel, which have ever

since been rescuing lost and despairing men.

It is possible that THE TREASURE and THE PEARL were also spoken on this occasion, and that they were left out of the third gospel because its writer had seen the original sources of the first gospel. But these two parables are needed where they are, to complete the outline of all the essential truths of the Gospel. The truth they illustrate is the centre and circumference of all the parables of the second cluster.

Publicans and sinners follow Jesus on his final journey to Jerusalem. But His last parables are not for them. Something more is to be said to the Pharisees and to the apostate nation. He stands for the last time in their temple, takes up the parables of judgment in the first group and enlarges them in a series of awful severity, and yet He begins in a way which is full of yearning love for them : Two SONS, one says, I go, but never stirs a step ; the other says, I

will not, and then repents, and goes to work in his father's vineyard. Jesus will not accept the refusal His people had given Him six months before. That must not be their last word. It is not too late. They may yet be husbandmen in the vineyard.

But the next parable is **THE WICKED**

HUSBANDMEN. Will they dare, after that, to kill the Son of God? Then,

THE MARRIAGE OF THE KING'S SON.

Will they be thrust into outer dark-

ness, or else appear in the hypocrisy

of their own religion, and leave the

wedding garments to publicans and

to harlots? Then, **THE FIVE TALENTS:**

their patriarchs and prophets were

talented men, and had transmitted

their own inspirations to the whole

nation. What has it done with its

Lord's money?

These are the last solemn words of

the Messiah to His anointed people.

The three parables of judgment in

the first group are fully expanded.

His instructions to the apostles at

the last supper are illustrated with

many beautiful emblems, but **THE**

VINE AND ITS BRANCHES is an allegory, not a parable.

Many parables have been omitted in this enumeration, which is intended only to indicate the three prominent groups spoken in rapid succession at critical periods of Christ's ministry. The Sermon on the Mount is the written constitution of His kingdom. The parables of the first group illustrate the first principles of the Gospel, and they are equally applicable to all men. The welcome to sinful and disheartened man demands another series of extended illustrations. Last of all, the guilt and danger of rejecting the great salvation, which is offered freely to all, must be plainly declared in the parables of judgment.

The chronological arrangement is not followed at all in this volume. The most important problems of our own times are the only objects in view, and the parables selected are ranged with reference to the order in which these modern questions can be

studied best in the light of Christ's illustrations. They are all pictures of His kingdom with an eternal perspective. They would not be true if motive and hope were vanishing on a nearer horizon. The Sadducees had lost the far, and the Pharisee the near, horizon. The religion and morality of both were hideous caricatures. The Sermon on the Mount fixes the true vanishing point, and makes all delineations of righteous men and institutions converge where one is looking not on things seen, but on things not seen and eternal in the heavens. First of all, Christ describes individual men who belong to His kingdom. They are poor in spirit, destitute of all virtue and good inspirations, but they are welcome because they are conscious of their destitution. After, and not before, they enter into the kingdom, they mourn for their sins and are comforted. This submission to God, and this humility in the sight of men, is the meekness which inherits spiritual power on earth. And then, not first,

nor second, nor third, but fourth, and in the very centre of their growing experience, they feel the hunger and thirst which nothing but the righteousness of God can satisfy. Then they take notice of the sufferings of their fellow-men, and obtain mercy for themselves and others. They are growing in purity of heart until they can endure as seeing Him who is invisible, and are called children of God because they are all peacemakers among men. And a few of them are sure to become heroes at last who can suffer and die for righteousness' sake. Yet, after all, the most exalted blessedness of the greatest souls on earth is precisely the same which was promised while they were destitute of all spiritual qualities; theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

—These Beatitudes are just as complete as the Ten Commandments. They exhaust all qualifications for citizenship in the kingdom and trace the exact order of its endowments and responsibilities. The most casual reading of this preamble to its con-

stitution forbids all attempts to identify it with any institution which has ever appeared among men. Churches belong to the kingdom, but the kingdom is not the Church. The word occurs only twice in all of Christ's recorded teachings—Thou art a man of rock, and on this rock I will build My Church; one man and ten more who instantly joined him in his great confession: this was the first Church of Christ. How large may a true Church become? Two or three hundred, perhaps two or three thousand; but two or three hundred thousand would be too many, for they must meet together in one place and be agreed as touching anything they ask in His name. And one of the most important things to obtain by prayer is the wisdom to restore an erring brother. This delicate work of charity can best be done by two or three persons. The word 'church' may have another meaning in a few passages of the epistles, and there may be no objection to apply this

designation to institutions which have become necessary and useful in the progress of Christianity. But our Lord certainly describes the Church as a spiritual centre, in every locality, of all the forces of His kingdom. The Church must have no conflicts, and must be kept clear of offences, and therefore it must not include too many.

But the kingdom of God includes as many as possible. Offences must needs come, and the kingdom ought not to evade the inevitable conflicts of righteousness with wickedness. It is not a kingdom of this world, because it enlists neither wealth nor military power nor political authority to sustain its sovereignty. But it does assert, and it always maintains, a spiritual supremacy over them all; therefore it welcomes and compels all sorts and conditions of men to accept its privileges and responsibilities. None are good enough to come. None are too bad to come. The kingdom of heaven in all ages and in every land consists of all men

who are working together or who can be combined for righteousness. A welcome as wide as God's mercy is offered to this magnificent republic of God.

These parables of the kingdom are vivid illustrations of open and hopeful questions of our times. We remember, with a shudder, recent times when men had to set themselves against the churches in order to be uncompromising antagonists of the greatest crime in the land. They will never need to join our churches to be uncompromising supporters of righteousness. He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit. We are discarding the prejudice which would forbid those who follow not after us to cast out devils. Everybody who is not against Christ is on our side. One man who is right is a majority, if a million are against him in the wrong. Our homes, our churches, our civil governments, our clubs, and men working one by one, are all within the kingdom of heaven, only so far, and just so far, as they are

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doing the will of our Father who is in heaven.

The most revolutionary teaching of the Gospel is to be found in the parables of the Divine judgment. The same eternal perspective is retained in them all. There will be a final coming of Christ to judge the quick and the dead. But two sayings of His forbid, in terms, the traditional interpretation which restricts the judgments of these parables to the last coming of Christ. There are some standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. This generation shall not pass till all these things—the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, the tribes of the earth mourning, the angels sounding the trumpet and gathering the elect from the four winds, and from one end of heaven to the other—till ALL THESE THINGS shall be fulfilled.

These explicit words have not passed away, but there was never a

time when they needed more to be rescued from obscurity. They describe Divine judgments during the lifetime of men, in unprecedented and awful dispensations of providence. They all point to the last judgment and to its irreversible decisions. But only one parable expressly speaks of death and of the great gulf which is fixed and impassable. The casting into outer darkness, the wailing and gnashing of teeth cannot possibly refer exclusively to retributions beyond the grave. For these are almost the very words which were repeated on the Day of Pentecost, and saved thousands who had not been pricked to the heart when they fell from the lips of the Messiah they had crucified. These awful words are the most realistic descriptions in literature of the remorse for sin which leads to repentance, and not to despair.

Thus the true warrant for Christian optimism is furnished by these parables of judgment. The sentimentalism, which finds the whole

Gospel in the central cluster, cannot abide the brightness of His coming. Within the memory of some of us there was a day of judgment which restored, not only the severest of Christ's woes upon the wicked, but also the imprecatory Psalms, to a place in Christian teaching, which was neither vindictive nor hopeless. The fatal doubt, lest the wicked prolong their lives in wickedness, and lest sentence against their evil works be never executed, would make the best of men apostates and deserters. There was a good man once who watched the prosperity of the wicked until his feet were almost gone; then he went into the sanctuary of God and understood their end. Another pessimist frankly confesses that he went about to cause his heart to despair because of the oppression of the poor and the violent perverting justice, until he hated his own life and all his labour. At last he reaches this horrible conclusion: Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it by brutal force,

because there is no retribution for thy stratagems, nor for thy cunning, nor for thy prudence, in the grave where thou goest. And yet this was by no means the conclusion of the whole matter. In better moments he exclaimed, I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, and that it shall not be well with the wicked.

The judgments of this life are the most merciful dispensations of Providence. The last and severest words— of the parables of judgment are flaming with the love of God for sinful men, and radiant with hope for a suffering world.

CHAPTER II.

A DIVINE VALUATION OF HUMAN NATURE; THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

The power to set the heart right, to renew the springs of action, comes from Christ. The sense of the infinite worth of the single soul, and the recoverableness of a man at his worst are the gifts of Christ.—DRUMMOND.

HAVE you understood all of these things? They answered: Yea, Lord. That is what we have all been answering ever since. It is easy to understand such simple parables as these—the treasure hid in a field is a good character. We must deny ourselves the honours and pleasures of the world to purchase the whole field of capacities and opportunities where this treasure may be developed. The —pearl of great price is virtue, which we must obtain at the cost of everything we possess.

Nay, have we understood all of these things? Our own sacrifices to obtain virtue—are we sure that this is the kingdom of heaven? It is the kingdom of Pythagoras, of Seneca and of Kant. The whole stress of natural ethics is laid on our own strivings after virtue. It is the kingdom of Saul of Tarsus. Is it the kingdom of the man who counts his own righteousness as a dead loss? The ethics of Christ is a gospel. Are these the glad tidings to bewildered men, that their salvation is something hidden, and jealously covered up in a field alienated from their possession? Must they search the world around and sound the depths of the sea? And what do they possess for the purchase of the treasure after it has been discovered? A voluntary sacrifice of ambitions and indulgences which are worse than useless in themselves, a sore life of penances, and good works enough to merit salvation! This would be exactly what Paul means by falling from grace.

Such an interpretation would never have been devised if the parables of the hid treasure and of the pearl had been grouped with the story of the Good Shepherd leaving the ninety and nine, and going into the mountains to seek the one sheep which had gone astray. But why are they out of place where they stand? In all the parables of this cluster the Son of Man is coming to save that which is lost. The kingdom of heaven in two parables which Christ interprets is like sowing a field, and the Son of Man is the sower. Again, it is like dragging the sea with a net. Of course the fisher who casts the great Gospel net is also the Son of Man. Why should we take the two short parables between the Sower and the Net out of this Divine combination, and put ourselves in the place of the Divine searcher for the hid treasure and the pearl of great price?

The field is the world; the field where wheat and tares are growing, and also the field where the treasure

is hid. The sea is the world; the sea where the net is drawing to the shore both good and bad, and also the sea where many shells of little value are found, and one pearl of great price. And this is precisely the kingdom of heaven: the Redeemer of the world sowing His great harvest field and searching the depths of the sea. He finds one treasure which is worth the cost to redeem the whole earth. He forsakes the joys of heaven, to purchase one pearl of great price. His pearl is the lost soul of man.

This illustration will not seem extravagant if we think of the great souls who have flashed their light over dark ages of the past. Egypt was purchased and preserved because it was the hiding-place for a race that would produce Moses. Out of the encrusted bigotry of the Pharisees was rescued the glorious mind of Paul. The church which had become a synagogue of Satan was covered from destruction while it was the only possible field for

Savonarola's prophecies. And only a few of these rarest gems have become radiant on earth. There were seven thousand once of whom the greatest prophet of his time never got a glimpse. An exceeding great multitude that no man can number of all nations and kingdoms and tongues shall at last come out of the great tribulation. Their lives are hid now with Christ in God. Then they shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom above. The wealth of heaven is the communion of saints found on earth and kept hid from its evil in the purchased field.

Shall we say, then, that the pearl of great price means all good men, and stop there? But how came they to be good? Is this the Divine valuation of human nature in its most perfect development? Where was the pearl found, and what was it worth at first?

A few years ago a little child was sleeping peacefully in a room near to a saloon which was full of drunken

men. There was a quarrel. A woman interfered. The child was roused by an awful scream, and opened the door to see her father beat her mother to death. She was found in the morning sitting in sleepless horror by the lifeless form. This child was Christ's pearl of great price. Nobody doubts it now that she has become a noble woman, giving her services for the reform of inebriates. She was Christ's pearl of great-price then. And so was the murderer himself. His repentance under just punishment might not fully verify this to our belief, but one such malefactor was with the Lord in paradise on the very day of his repentance in the agonies of death. What depths of iniquity has Christ explored to find His pearl of great price!

Where did He find you and me? By the fireside in our peaceful homes, in halls of learning and surrounded by all the refinements of modern society? But He is not seeking for the casket, nor for the shell. His

treasure is the heart itself. Have the environments of civilisation saved conscience from lethargy, and nerved the will for duty? The most disheartening search is not in benighted regions, nor in chasms opened by crime, but where culture itself is making men cynical. The hiding-places in the East used to be levelled and planted with fragrant flowers and delicious fruits. The plunderer of our souls takes pains to cultivate a showy growth of amiable impulses and graceful accomplishments, that the heart may be concealed the more securely. This is the one object of the Redeemer's search. The central truth of the parable is lost if we make the least restriction in its application to the whole human race. (Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is THE WHOLE OF MAN.) Not merely the whole duty, but the whole nature of man. Man is distinguished from creatures below him by this one capacity to recognise his obligation to his Creator. It is their nature to

fear him, it is his nature to fear God. And this parable describes the search, not for good men, but for human nature in its moral quality and in its spiritual capacity.

What is the Divine valuation of human nature? The first indication of it is the purchase of the whole field. This cannot be an insignificant feature of our parables. In short illustrations like these there are no embellishments. The field is the world, and it was alienated from God when for us men and for our salvation His Son came down from heaven. The whole creation was groaning and travailing in pain, revolting from the shock which was thwarting its destiny. But now that our Redeemer has found where His treasure is hid, all nature rises to a posture of eager expectation, animated by the hope that every created thing shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of God's own children. Paul's wonderful hymn of Nature's Gospel has its

prelude in these two parables. To make the earth a safe home for man, Christ has set all nature throbbing and thrilling with the instinctive hope of a full restitution in a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness shall reign for ever.

Another indication of its value is our Lord's painful search for the lost soul in a hostile world. Hiding treasures in a field was a common practice in the Orient, where property lacked the security of a government fostering industry, of banks and of solid investments. Values too bulky to be carried on the person were often buried. No friend could be trusted with the secret. If the owner never returned the treasure would be lost, unless some peasant should become suddenly rich by stumbling upon it. To this day our explorers cannot convince the people of the land where this story was told that they are not digging for treasures hid in a field. Marvellous reports are well authen-

ticated of immense wealth unearthed on ground untrodden for centuries. The Divine explorer was just discovering His treasure by His own wrestlings with the temptations inseparable from our nature, when He was met by the challenge of the plunderer: All the kingdoms of this world are delivered unto me and to whomsoever I will I give them. But this appeal to human ambition failed. One who knew its fatal danger was searching for a treasure which the devil could no longer conceal. Oriental literature abounds in legends of magicians who could detect by secret art the spot where the search for buried wealth would be rewarded.) The myths were prophecies. No superstitions are benighting enough; no adornments are bright enough to cover the treasure from the Omniscient eye. Divine yearning and unwearied love search for that which is lost until it is found.

And there is always a response to the Divine search in human nature. A mother's groping in a forest for a

lost child is guided at last by the cry of alarm from a distance. How did Jesus find the profligate woman of Samaria and Zacchaeus the extortioner and Peter after his cursing and swearing? They were unconsciously answering His calls. And you also may be bewildered by the tragedies of life, you may have lost capacity for the implicit faith of childhood, you may find no steadfast convictions to take its place, and you may be giving yourself up for lost. Now He has found you. You are exactly where His human sympathies reach you. You have in your heart this instant a response to the search which has always been at once so manly and so motherly. Christ has opened all the doors into the unknown, and sounded all the depths where earnest thought ever plunges, and this painful search is the measure of the valuation which He sets upon your spiritual nature.

The cost of redemption is the truest mark of the value of human

nature. Jesus Christ was the only spiritual expert who knew exactly what is in man. He could read thoughts and hopes and capacities as we read books. How much did He give for His pearl of great price? Twice in these parables the words linger on the lips that were yet to drain the cup in Gethsemane: for the joy thereof He went and sold all that He had. (He emptied Himself, — and sank down from the glory He had with His Father before all worlds, to our low estate.) He was rich, and for our sakes He became poor. The pearl-diver seizes a heavy stone to hasten his descent to the bottom. And when our Lord was on the search for His pearl of great price He took not the nature of angels. That would have kept Him from sinking down to find our guilty souls. And even human nature in its innocence would have been too buoyant. He knew no sin, but God sent forth His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. He consented to veil his Omniscience, and became a speechless child, to

grow out of ignorance, to be partaker of all our infirmities, and in every experience of life to become our own brother. He found us not where we are at our best, but where we were at our worst.

What did He give for His pearl of great price? When the pearl-diver sinks, the waters close over him. You have sometimes held your breath when a friend was too long under water, but you never endured that suspense more than thirty seconds. Trained divers cannot live under water without modern apparatus for respiration more than two minutes. What must have been the despair of angels and men when the Searcher for lost souls was in the grasp of death three days and three nights. It was there He purchased His pearl of great price. Many goodly pearls He had found before. There were ninety and nine just persons who needed no repentance. For the one that was lost (He sacrificed His life.)

— Human nature has an intrinsic

value worth this immeasurable cost. — Man was made in the image of God. He stands enthroned in reason, freedom, and personal responsibility. A body of surpassing beauty, walks erect, supple and strong, speaking in expressive glances out of the windows of a soul which awes all subordinate creatures, giving voice in music and eloquence to the varying emotions within, animated by an immortal spirit, and destined to be changed into a glorious form, which shall be the organ of its heavenly life. The treasure found in the field was not removed, but the field was purchased for its use, and the re—
—deemed earth is still the field for the exercise of the ransomed nature of —man. In this life it is a kingdom of heaven to put forth all our powers of body and mind in the service of our Redeemer. And in the life beyond the grave this earth may still be the home of God's children; He will be mindful of His own hid treasure. I know that my Redeemer liveth, and over my dust He will stand triumph—

ant, and apart from my flesh I shall see God. Human nature ransomed by the blood of Christ and re-invigorated by His indwelling Spirit is the heir of mansions which may be preparing on a new earth where righteousness shall reign for ever.

But above its intrinsic worth, human nature has acquired an enhanced value, in the Divine estimation, by the disasters it has suffered. The Creator of all things visible and invisible may have selected the pearl as the emblem of this value, because no other gem could supply the illustration. Scientific tests have proved that the formation of pearls of the purest lustre is caused by some injury which the shell receives. By a fall or a blow a small bead of the mother-of-pearl is detached, around which concentric layers of wavy calcified membrane gradually form until they are solidified, and glow at last with surpassing radiance.

God is love. God esteems nothing in the universe so dear to Him as

the love of His creatures.—And when He looked down into this dark world and saw human nature bruised by its fall, He saw in this very disaster—
 — the capacity for a new and a more tender love than He had ever received. They who never needed repentance could not give Him the gratitude of broken and contrite—
 — hearts. The one that was lost could love Him with a new affection growing out of the very shock of the great transgression.— What else does Christ mean by sending the question down the ages, Which of them—
 — will love Him most? and by setting His seal to the answer, The one that was forgiven most? — *John*

No wonder we have been reading these parables falsely. (The breadth and length, the depth and height of the love of God has surpassed our knowledge.) We supposed there was nothing worth seeking in us, and the pearl of great price must be the grace—
 — which we are to seek in God. But here is something in us dearer to God than all heaven without us. The

Son of God sold all that He had, and joyfully paid the price of His anguish on the cross to purchase what the heaven of heavens would never contain until He brought it up from the depths of our degradation—the gratitude and the devotion of the forgiven, broken and contrite heart of man, the new and lustrous gem in the Redeemer's crown. *There*

Our studies of present-day questions must begin with these illustrations of the love of God to men and of their response to His calls of mercy. A philosophic basis for altruism might be found in the moral order of nature. Not only ethical, but economic, investigations might lead to the same conclusions. But the mind that was in Christ Jesus affords a Divine sanction for the highest value which can be estimated for human nature.

— And the parable of the pearl, if our interpretation be true, furnishes the most beautiful illustration of the one

— capacity of our nature at its worst

which has the greatest value in the sight of God. —

Here beginneth our study of the wrongs which men are suffering. The call for repentance will never reach corporations and parliaments until the hearts of men are broken and —contrite. The best thing in human nature, according to the Divine valuation, is also the most effective power in all social reforms. —

CHAPTER III.

THE DIVINE ENDOWMENT OF HUMAN NATURE; THE TALENTS.

“O Lord God, the inspirer and enlightener of all the prophets, speak to me also, lest being only outwardly warned but not inwardly quickened, I die and be found unfruitful. O speak to the comfort of my soul, to the renovation of my heavenly nature.”—THOMAS A KEMPIS.

THIS parable first gave the word talent to all Christian languages, and yet the word has perpetuated a false interpretation of the parable. Quickness of learning, shrewdness in affairs, fluency of speech, dexterity in work, and all sorts of natural capacities have been crowded together under the popular designation of talents. Such indefiniteness is precluded by the parable itself, and by the place it holds in the connected teachings of our Lord.

The proprietor of an immense

estate has purchased hundreds of slaves and has won their affection by kindness. He has lived among them long enough to train them in his business and to reward them for faithfulness. But now he is about to travel into a far country. From the parallel parable of the Ten Pounds we learn that he is actually the heir to the kingdom of which this estate is a small part, that he is going now to be crowned, that he will return as monarch, and that he leaves these trusted slaves among hostile citizens who will rise in rebellion as soon as his back is turned. He calls them all together and distributes his goods, assigning routine and subordinate duties to most of them. But there are a few of them, three in one parable and ten in the other, with capacities and training for more responsible service. To them he confides his talents.

The talent was not a coin, but a measure by weight, and had the intrinsic value in gold of about twenty-five thousand dollars. At that time,

when one of the smallest coins in circulation was fair pay for a day's work, the purchasing power of a talent was beyond computation. Our best translation would be: to one servant he gave five millions, to another three and to another one million. These enormous trusts can mean but one thing: he divided his investments into graded departments, and made these picked men, according to their several abilities, responsible for the management and profits of his entire property. When he came back they alone were summoned to give account of their stewardship. There are other parables for mere labourers in the vineyard, who have only their Lord's goods to account for. The question for these three controllers of the whole estate is: What have you done with your Lord's talents?

This parable was spoken to men who could not possibly empty the great word of its startling precision. It follows the woes pronounced on Scribes and Pharisees and the ad-

monitions to watch for the coming of the King to judgment, and it introduces the solemn description of the coming of the Son of Man. The men were not there who were the most talented in the popular sense of the word. For ages wealth and science had been given to Egypt, the commerce of the seas to the Phœnicians, genius for philosophy, literature, and the arts to the Greeks, and at last world-wide dominion to the Romans. These were the goods which had been committed to the other servants, and in spite of age-long abuse, Divine blessings had followed these successive civilisations.

But the men who had listened to these last appeals in their Temple, and who were now surrounding Jesus, had received something else as much more valuable than all these goods combined as a million is greater than a unit. To this one rude nation without expanding territory, and without military power for conquest, God had entrusted His revealed Law, a worship purely spiritual, prophetic inspiration,

and His written oracles. They had a passion for faith and for family purity. Their language was incapable of double meanings and of philosophical distinctions, but rich beyond comparison in descriptions of Divine attributes and of human virtues. To this people of the Covenant He had finally sent His only begotten Son as their Messiah and the world's Redeemer. This is the predicted hour. The Angel of the Covenant has come suddenly to their Temple to reckon with them. What have they done with the Lord's talents? The other servants will be called to account for wasting the ordinary gifts of Providence. But Divine inspirations were given to the Jews in order to make them His spiritual commissioners for the whole world. Their Temple was intended to be a house of prayer for all nations. Their isolation was for their protection from the vices, not for indifference to the miseries, of others. They ought to have kept their talents in

circulation for the winning of surrounding races from idolatry and from sensuality, by the time when the Desire of all Nations should come. But this day of judgment found them unresponsive to their high calling, and covetous of mere goods, while their one talent, the unspeakable gift of God, was tarnished and useless—buried in the grave of their bigotry!

The napkin in which it has been so sedulously wrapped must be torn to shreds. Their Temple, ritual, and commonwealth, must be destroyed. The talent must be taken from the unprofitable servant, and must be given to other servants who have been faithful over a few things, and over precisely those things which are spiritual talents, and not natural goods. They also are standing around Jesus when the wonderful parable is pronounced. One of them, the writer of this gospel, has been trained as a business man; another is full of impetuous energy; and another, of keen and tender insights; still another will be added to

their company, a few years later, who has the training of the great university in Tarsus, and of the theological school in Jerusalem. But these are only their goods, which they will count as nothing after they receive their talents. And to-morrow night, in the seclusion of their last supper together, Jesus will tell them precisely what their talents are. They will tarry in Jerusalem until this Divine endowment is given. It will come from heaven suddenly, with new tongues, prophecies, and miracle-working faith. The revelations and inspirations which have been so long smothered by Jewish bigotry, will be taken away from the unprofitable servant and given to men who will swiftly win their way to moral supremacy over the whole world.

These farewell discourses and the prayer of Christ the night before He suffered, so signally fulfilled in the events of the day of Pentecost, are an exact and detailed interpretation of the parable of the talents:

I am not leaving you orphans; (I have come to show you the Father and to be the way, the truth, and the life to you. I am going to Him now on purpose to give you full power to do greater works than I have been doing among you.) This new endowment will be the Spirit of Truth, who will take away your heart-troubles, keep you in peace, teach you all things, and bring My teachings to your remembrance in their full meaning. Then you will draw all your life from Me as the branch from the vine, and love one another as I have loved you and as My Father has loved Me. For I am leaving you in My place. You have been glad to call yourselves My servants and will always write your names as slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is true that I have bought you at the cost of My life. But I call you My servants no more, because a servant has only routine work to do at the dictation of a master. But the Spirit of the Truth, to be given you now, will make you under-

stand all things committed to Me by My Father, and will invest you with the supreme responsibility of My kingdom. You will stand against the temptations and persecutions of a hostile world. It will ostracise and murder you. And yet the best possible thing for you and for the world also is for Me to disappear from your sight, and to obtain from the Father this endowment of spiritual power, that you may overcome hatred by your sufferings and by your witness to the truth. (I shall be really absent only a few days. The coming of the Spirit will be also my own invisible, but actual, return, to remain with you all your days.

And now ask for everything you need. You have come to Me for daily directions and encouragements. But up to this time you have never asked Me for anything, compared with the inestimable gift I am now promising. I cannot make you understand yet what you will need in the course of your ministry. I promise you all power to discharge

the solemn trusts I am committing to you.

And then, after this full description of the Divine endowment, it was actually obtained by Christ's last sacrificial prayer. (He presented before His Father the men who were to stand in His place in founding and in administering His Kingdom.) He prayed that they might be kept from the evil of the world they were about to encounter, and for their uninterrupted communion with the Father, with Himself, and with one another. He prayed for victorious power to attend their witness to the redemption of the world by His approaching death and resurrection.

(From the hour this prayer was answered, the apostles were talented men. All power in heaven and earth, given into the hands of the ascended Redeemer, was transferred to them.) They could no more use those pledges for their benefit, than plenipotentiaries could make money out of their own credentials. But they were omnipotent in prayer for the repentance

of thousands on the day of Pentecost, and for the accomplishment of their mission to the whole world. Their spiritual powers were their talents.)

This restriction of the meaning of the word seems to be also a restriction of its application to a very limited number of His disciples. Mystics, ancient and modern, have sometimes made distinctions between themselves and ordinary Christians, as if they alone were receiving this endowment of the Spirit for exceptional holiness and for special service. Others have been too ready to accept this exclusion of themselves from spiritual responsibilities. It would be a relief to say I have no talent at all; I am to take my place among those other servants. It is a good place. I also am bought with a price; — I do not belong to myself, and none of the goods I am handling are mine by my own right. — So I will be a door-keeper in the house of the Lord, take care of the finances of the church, and do all the good I can in a quiet

way. How few are the talented men in the gospel sense ! Only ten in one parable and only three in the other. The inspired prophets do not surpass these proportions now. I will take orders from them, and use my goods faithfully. I have not even one talent.

There is one petition of Christ's consecrating prayer which expressly excludes this humility. He prayed not only for the eleven men whom He presented before His Father, but for all of us who should ever believe on Him through their word. And He prayed for precisely the same things which the Apostles received : that we with them might all be one, as the Father and the Son are one, and that the unity and force of our witness might impart repentance and faith to a hostile world. This is certainly a responsibility which the quietest of us must share with our talented brethren. Have we been oblivious of it in our brisk schemes for Christian unity without effectual prayers for the Spirit who

alone can unite us? Have we been disobedient to our own heavenly visions in a voluntary humility and a worshipping of angels of the churches to whom we are too eager to assign all spiritual endowments and responsibilities?

The fact is, there is no other endowment of the spirit on which the Scriptures lay such emphasis as on the talent of the quiet disciple who loves to work under the direction of others. The study to be quiet and to do one's own business is inspired work. There is one business, at least, for which every man is supremely responsible: to keep himself unspotted from the world and to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ. No other can trade with this gift, and it is not among the things of God which are merely good. It may be that few of us have received five talents, but the most searching lesson of the parable is to the man of one talent. And we can all recognise by a moment's reflection

one gift which is a talent in this restricted sense.

Many years ago, a scholar received the highest prize of his college, and from that hour began to lose all interest in life. Nothing could rouse him from his profound depression, until he went to the president, and came out from a long interview, white and trembling. The same evening at prayers he confessed before the assembled professors and students that the prize he had received was awarded for an essay which he had copied word for word from the manuscript of another. He had surrendered the prize to the president; he implored his fellow students not to abate their contempt for him, which was immeasurably surpassed by his own remorse, and he asked only that they would wait until he might redeem the confidence which he had forfeited. Three years later, when he was ordained as a minister of the Gospel he made the same confession, and insisted on repeating it in his

first sermon to the church he was to serve.

The inspiration to make that confession was his one talent. There is a parable in modern fiction which gives a pathetic description of a worse confession by a Puritan minister. There was no other place in the universe where the heart-broken man could have escaped vengeance except that scaffold of shame. The student repented in time. He never lost the inspiration which began with the Divine power to do the hardest duty in the world. He lived and died a faithful preacher of repentance and righteousness and he is remembered with affection and veneration.

Think of your own conflicts. There is a duty before you, clear and imperative. Your mind is wide awake. Your conscience is clamorous. But you cannot do this hard thing. It is literally true; you cannot do it. Gradually or suddenly, you say to yourself, I ought to do it, I must do it, I will do it, and you

rise up, and do your duty. That is your talent. It is a power absolutely supernatural. It is not in your intellect, nor in your conscience, nor in your will. It is power from on high. It is the flaming of conscience by fire from the Altar of God.

This one talent to repent of sin, and to do our duty, we have all received. Classifications of men as Christians or as worldly people are insufferable on such a criterion as this. The Kingdom of Heaven has this one gift for all men, and it is the greatest thing in the world.

Talented men, according to these parables, are those, and only those who are moved by a genuine inspiration to do their duty. The word must be divested of all association with theories of the inspiration of the Scriptures. It must also be carefully distinguished from fervour in selfish work. With these obvious discriminations we may all say, without ostentation and with thankfulness to God, that our best inspirations are our talents. There may be many

services which some of us can render to God and to our fellow-men without inspiration. There is some one thing which every true child of God can do for righteousness' sake, only with the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The talent always means consecrated enthusiasm.

Why should we hesitate to ascribe to the Spirit of the Truth, who is Lord and Giver of life, the enthusiasm of the great men who are saving life by their scientific discoveries, by their brilliant operations, and by their patient services of the suffering? The legal adviser whose love of justice is a passion, who never covers iniquity by subterfuge, but makes the laws of man serve the behests of God's righteousness is a talented man. Teachers of youth are among the most enthusiastic of all Christ's disciples; and the arts and every legitimate business in the world must be pursued with the same enthusiasm in order to reach their highest development and to render the services

which the Lord requires in the exercise of His rarest spiritual gifts.

The natural gifts which made Mozart a genius could not account for the well-known scene in the monastery on the Danube, when he touched a grand organ for the first time. The Lord was calling the child, and all that was within him was answering, Here am I. Such enthusiasm as this must have spiritual qualities, and it is always Divine. And it will be sure to find an adequate organ. A mightier organ than chapel or cathedral possesses is this instant sounding all over the land and calling our most gifted children. The hum of machinery, the rush of freight trains, the landing and discharge of cargoes, all the thundering crash, and all the harmonies, of the world's work: this is the Divinest music they can hear and the only music they can make. They know how to turn inventions to use and to train men to work them. They are not shy of artists and artisans. They have the

courage to embark capital in new enterprises. They are fired by a venturesome spirit and sustained by a dogged perseverance. Almost as rare as genius for art, and incomparably more useful, are the tact, the courage, and the patience of averaging the products of machinery to the routine work of labourers, and to the uses of consumers by transportation. These rare and splendid endowments of business men, if only they become inspired with enthusiasm for righteousness, always become the commanding forces of the Gospel.

And if not! Then the business man, the artist, the physician, the lawyer, the statesman, the editor, and even the prophet of God, have suffocated their best inspirations, and are nothing. Their magnificent enterprises which have been devoted to the relief of the poor, their service in the cause that was unpopular which has made martyrs of them, and all their splendid achievements

have been prompted by sheer ambition or by fanatical zeal; they have no love for the oppressed whose cause they have championed, nor for Him who came down from heaven to be their brother. Their talents must be taken from them, and given to another, who may have no goods to feed the poor, and neither the capacity nor the opportunity for splendid service. He is only a good man standing in his bank or in his office or in his workshop. By-and-by somebody touches him and virtue goes out of him; that virtue is nothing less than a divine life in him overcoming the baser nature. He is afraid of nothing but sin against God, and he cares for nothing but to do his duty. And now somebody who is shaken by the selfishness and cowardice which are enticing him to commit an outrageous fraud touches this flaming conscience, and he will feel the contact to the last day of his life.

Let every man abide in his own calling and beware of burying his talent. An accusing conscience, an

unresponsive temper, a cynical spirit, and a false notion of independence, will smother the inspirations of the profoundest scholar. An ambition for wealth and display will smother the inspirations of the business man. They are the unspeakable gifts of Him who became a business man in order to be the teacher of all men who labour and are heavy laden. He invites every man to take His yoke. It is a yoke for two, and He is the other. The burden is light because of this Divine companionship. He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit.

CHAPTER IV.

FINANCIAL REPENTANCE ; THE UNJUST STEWARD.

Peace is not yet, and wrong and want and woe
Cry in the streets, and love is slow,
And sin is sleek and swift and housed and fed.
SOPHIE JEWETT.

For my own part, if I had an insupportable burden, if for any cause I were bent on sacrificing every earthly hope as a peace offering towards heaven, I would make the wide world my cell, and good deeds to mankind my prayer. Many penitent men have done this and found peace in it.
HAWTHORNE.

THE parable of the prodigal who is spending money unscrupulously is instantly followed by a parable of the steward who is making money unscrupulously. And to emphasize the greater guilt and danger of dishonest accumulations, another parable is added, of the rich man in hell. Spending money is not the worst way of wasting the bounty of God. They

shall receive the greater damnation who live in luxury and leave beggars to perish at their gates.

And yet they are stewards of God. We need no Gospel to tell us that princely benefactors, who have amassed all their wealth by the golden rule, are discharging a sacred trust. But our gamblers in futures, our managers of trusts, our manufacturers who keep the upper hand by freezing out all competition? Yes, they are all stewards of God. None of the wealth they are wasting belongs to themselves. Nobody else can lay hands on it. They have supreme responsibility, and they are wasting, not by riotous living, but by extortions and by resistless combinations, the capital, the safe-guards of law, the financial regulation of business, and their own shrewdness and training. All these inestimable values have been committed to them by the Master, who knows how long to give free-play to their avarice, for the building of rail-roads, for the opening of mines, and for the cheapening

of products needful to His children. They are called to account as soon as His purposes are ripe to bring good out of their wicked designs.

Too late for repentance in the next parable. Was it too late in this also? This is the crucial question in our interpretation, and it is a question of life and death to unscrupulous business men of our times. They are accused of wasting their Lord's goods. Their defence that they are making good use of their millions by the employment of labour and art to minister to their luxury has been reduced to absurdity a thousand times by the history and by the soundest principles of economics. They are accused, not by Anarchists and Communists and Socialists only. The attorneys, who have access to their books, and who conduct their litigation, protest against their monopolies. Political campaigns are fought on charges of enormous frauds specified in detail. These charges are not made after the accused are dead and

buried, but while their balance-sheets are capable of adjustment. It is not too late, it is high time to think, and it is suicide not to think; what shall I do when my Lord takes away my stewardship? I have lived in luxury so long that I am too feeble to dig, and too proud to beg. What is to become of me now?

Supremely selfish thoughts, started by no compunctions, only by base fears. Yes, but what else did Christ intend by these awful parables, except to rouse their fears? If conscience needs an earthquake, why not frighten an unscrupulous man out of the delusion that he can go on for ever cornering markets and collecting dividends? It is appointed to him once to die, and after that the judgment. This parable and its sequel will make him think of the days when he will be carried to his burial from his splendid mansion, and when the papers will announce that he has left twenty millions. And that will be a lie; his millions will have left him, and it will be too late

to falsify or to amend the account of his stewardship.

But he is not in torment yet. Here is a preliminary parable, starting thoughts not less agitating and selfish, but far more heartening. It is not too late. Here is another millionaire in precisely his peril, who did something which saved him from ruin. He made a sudden change in his business methods while he was still in charge, which secured him a good place after his final settlement with his present employer. What sort of a transaction was this? Turn to your commentaries. Read the lesson leaflets which are put into the hands of the bright boys in our Sunday-schools. Listen to the eulogies pronounced on founders of colossal charities from their vintage out of Naboth's vineyard. The popular reading of this parable makes out that the last was the meanest, the most tricky, and the most scandalous game this scoundrel ever played in his life : that he scaled down all the credits on his books, settled with

clients who were good for the whole, at varying reductions to eighty or fifty cents on the dollar, left the proprietor in the lurch for the loss, and for this undisguised bribery secured employment and a good living to himself after his discharge !

It is no defence of this interpretation to say that the man's own master, not ours, commended this sharp practice. Does our Lord say a word against his conduct, or make it in any way a contrast rather than a resemblance to His own portraits of good stewards? Does He not tell us that such men are wiser than children of light? Would He leave it to be inferred that honesty is sometimes not even the best policy? Would He charge all His disciples, one of whom He knew to be a thief already, to resort to cheating in order to make to themselves friends who would receive them into everlasting habitations? What kind of a place has He gone to prepare for us, if our welcome to its many mansions is to

be extended by the condoners of our own frauds!

The best way to meet an insurmountable difficulty in Scripture is to look at it calmly, and pass around it to other truths which you can understand. The worst way to meet this difficulty is to ascribe ethical nonsense to your Divine Teacher. In fact, there is a very simple way of surmounting the acknowledged difficulty here. Conjectures are never admissible in the application which Christ makes of His parables. He tells us expressly that no man can serve two masters. And this parable points out the way to settle with mammon before beginning the service of God. We are not informed what the exact method was, but it must have been a righteous settlement even with mammon. Jesus is talking to publicans and to Pharisees and to Judas Iscariot. He is calling men who have been guilty of sharp practices all their lives to become spiritual stewards over the true riches of the kingdom of heaven. But they

must come to Him with clean hands. They have not been faithful with the unrighteous mammon. They must make the best possible settlement of their extortions and frauds, and they must bring vouchers for contents of the bags they carry. They must repent of their dishonesty, and be faithful over what little is left after they have made just restitution.

So far we have not made a single conjecture. The man in the parable commended his steward who had been dishonest because at last he did something wisely; and Jesus said: Make friends for yourselves by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; be faithful in the unrighteous mammon; you have had the handling of trust funds and have submitted to the bondage of mammon, but now you are called to serve God, and you must break away from that thralldom.

The only difficulty is that we do not know what that wise thing was which the dishonest steward did at last. Here conjecture is admissible

.

Such conjectures are always useful in filling out the details of stories briefly reported in the gospels. Imagination may expand what the frightened man was saying within himself: I am doomed to lose my place; I was a poor man when I took it, but I have made it enormously profitable; the original capital will be all that the owner will find, for I have embezzled all the profits; he will prosecute me, and then my false entries and fraudulent contracts will be brought to light; I might get away with some of the plunder, but where can I ever set up business again? My reputation will follow me, and I can never get another place. No; I shall have to disgorge in any case, and while I am about it I may as well make thorough work. I am resolved to surrender all my accumulations, impoverish myself now, and so make all possible reparation to my employer. He will discharge me, of course, but there is another chance for me. I have cheated in ever so many accounts which are not yet settled. Who

knows, but justice, at this late day may get me another chance to become an honest man, and to obtain employment? Here come the very men who may yet save me from ruin.

How much do you owe? A hundred measures of oil? Yes, I remember you gave me your note for a hundred. But I only delivered fifty. See, I tear up the extortionate note. I sold the other fifty and pocketed the cash. Write a new note for fifty.

And you; how much wheat did I deliver on this note for a hundred measures? Eighty?—exactly; and there is no charge on the books for the twenty I kept back. Write me an honest note for the eighty.

And so on, until by the time the reckoning has come he has made every possible reparation. Vast frauds are beyond recall, but not beyond confession. The entries as profit and loss have balanced the embezzlements which he cannot make good, and he faces his employer at last, a bankrupt without a dollar of assets. His master

commends his repentance, and the debtors who have received partial justice at his hands take him on a moderate salary and give him another chance.

If we are to make conjectures at all, let them be at least within the bounds of common-sense and of reverence to Christ. That this was the settlement implied in the parable is rendered almost certain by a true story in the sequel. Zacchæus may have been among the publicans who listened to these words; and when another parable told how a publican might be justified, he resolved to see Jesus. Now he longs to get into a temple where he also can express his remorse. But One greater than the Temple enters his own house, which is filled with the plunder of the revenue. He makes unreserved confession of his extortions. To read his words, as if he meant to say: I have always been accustomed to give away half my goods and to make amends for false

accusation, is as contrary to the text as to all we know of the fiscal system by farming. Jesus replies to what he says: This day is salvation come to this house. This is the hour of repentance for a son of Abraham who has sold his soul to the oppressors of his nation. Now, standing before the people he has cheated, and before the Lord who is searching his heart, he makes over by a covenant, as binding as a deed, the full half of his wealth to the poor tradesmen who have enriched him by double payments of assessments bought of the government in advance. This atrocious revenue system has protected him in levying blackmail, taking hush-money, and practising all sorts of extortions. He pledges himself now to restore fourfold for all these exactions. This is salvation; and this must always be the faithfulness of a steward who has been unjust. Not a shrewd compromise, but taking the fifty or the twenty per cent. off from the watered stock and restoring values which

have been lost by legalised frauds. Honesty first. Fourfold reparation, to be on the safe side. Financial repentance.

This parable and its perfect interpretation in the case of Zacchæus is therefore a gospel for dishonest men. Their Saviour is giving them here their one talent—a flaming conscience. They can do something before their accounts are closed. And the first thing they have to do, certainly, and very likely all they will ever have to do, is to be faithful with the mammon of unrighteousness. They know how to handle that. With no talent at all, with nothing but natural shrewdness and acquired skill they have made it enormously profitable. Now they have the talent to make it earn true riches. It is a talent more widely distributed and more useful than the gift of prophecy. Business is business, and the kingdom of God needs inspired business-men. The everlasting habitations are not all in the heavenly world. Business men

must make friends in workshops where daily duties are recognised as divine. They must use the mammon of unrighteousness to make friends, first of all, with the clients who have suffered from their sharp practices. Many of these defrauded men are now in a kingdom of heaven where resentment cannot burn in their hearts. They are doing honest work to retrieve their losses, and also to lend a helping hand to their fellow-men. The life they are living in their business has eternal qualities. And they would gladly receive the enemies who have wronged them most. The unjust stewards must repent of their sharp practices, and make friends of all honest men, if it costs them their last dollar.

And we must make friends with them. Christian men in banks and offices! Why don't you preach this gospel to your unscrupulous associates? They will not come to our meeting-houses, and they never give us a fair hearing if they do come.

We don't know how to talk to them. You can always get at them. You can't say a word if you also are wasting the Lord's goods. But with clean hands and a good conscience you have the talents and the opportunities to be Christ's only witnesses to them. Why don't you read this parable to them? If they will not listen unless they are scared, reverse the order and begin with Dives. But tell them it is not too late. The speculator with trust funds for his collaterals need not be cast into outer darkness where there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. The rich man who is clothed in purple and fares sumptuously every day, need not die and be buried and lift up his eyes in hell being in torment. There is another parable which is a true gospel for the most unscrupulous men in the world.

Only don't twist and torture it into an apology for the very frauds which are already stunning conscience. Read your parable just as it stands, but for Christ's sake don't go on to comment in this style : Get all the

money you can, make a bargain with the surveyor of a new railroad that you will give him half the profits of your real estate speculations for a copy of his survey in advance of his report to the company; buy the farms where stations and cities must soon follow construction, inflate your manufacturing stocks by forming fictitious companies within your corporation, and by paying flush dividends out of one hand into the other; then unload them on widows and orphans and ministers, just before they begin to fall. Make contributions to both political parties and secure the pull on enormous contracts at double the profits fair competition would yield. Buy up or freeze out all rivals to your monopoly. Get and keep control of all the mammon of unrighteousness you can. And then make it righteous. Give unheard-of sums to libraries, hospitals, and missionary boards. Make friends of those who are sure to go to heaven, and they will call you a saint for your wonderful works, and pro-

nounce your eulogy when you die, and then they will sing sweet hymns about your welcome to the everlasting habitations!

Sweep these mufflers from conscience, and make it ring true. To earn money righteously is the only way to be faithful in its stewardship. And there is only one way for the dishonest man to begin. Right about face. Fifty per cent. restitution off one fraudulent contract, twenty per cent. off another, justice to the hair's breadth in advance of generosity, perpendicular financial repentance.

Thus the mammon of unrighteousness actually becomes a means of grace for entering into the kingdom of heaven on earth. Unscrupulous men of wealth have nothing else to work with. They know how to do business, and that is all they know. Doing business as slaves of mammon is hell. But the great gulf is not fixed yet. Tears and prayers will not get them across. Their

mammon is precisely the thing they need for their salvation. They cannot keep it, and try to make new friends by colossal charities. They must surrender it to make compensation to their rivals in business and to their own workmen. Then their former enemies will be turned into their best friends, and will be the first to receive them into everlasting habitations.

The nineteenth century will close with unsettled accounts of the stewards in charge of the common wealth of the United States. One combination took charge of the coal oil products, with little or no capital, in 1862, gained two millions and a half in ten years, increased it to seventy millions in ten more, and in 1892 it was worth one hundred and sixty-six and a half millions, after distributing more than a hundred millions as dividends. Another combination has taken the stewardship of the fuel of the people, and in about twenty-five years it has amassed a capital of five

hundred millions. The stewards of sugar have replaced the original capital of ten millions by bonds of the same amount, issued capital which is all water, of seventy-five millions, and are raising the price of this necessary enough to make profits of twenty-eight millions a year. Every comfort of life and the very caskets of the dead are rapidly passing into the control of these modern stewards.

And the day of settlement is rapidly approaching. The twentieth century will certainly witness the end of this revival of the monopolies of the eighteenth century. Will the end come without another revolution? No prophet can say, but God is saying by the events of His providence, and by the voice of the people, to every unjust steward, Thou canst be no longer steward! Woe unto them that join house to house and lay field to field till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth. They are wasting the food, the light, the warmth, and all the good things of their

fathers' children, and their stewardship must cease.

They can prevent revolutions. Perhaps neither civil government, nor labour unions, nor reform agencies can displace these stewards without violence, but they have it in their power to displace themselves. And they would instantly find themselves in better places. They are the best-equipped men in the land for services urgently needed at this moment. They have in hand the means to arrest the waste and to make restitution for the robbery of modern business methods. And this parable is a summons to timely and merciful judgment. It brands upon conscience the infamy of continuing to be exploiters of unearned profits, and it extends a sure hope to all the unjust stewards in the world that they may yet become eminent public servants.

CHAPTER V.

THE LABOUR QUESTION : THE OTHER SIDE ; THE GOOD SAMARITAN.—I.

I saw the great treading down the little, and the strong beating down the weak, and cruel men fearing not, and kind men daring not, and wise men caring not ; and the saints in heaven forbearing and yet bidding me not to forbear ; forsooth I knew that he who doeth well in fellowship, and because of fellowship, shall not fail, though he seem to fail to-day, but in days hereafter shall he and his work be alive, and men be holpen by them to strive again and yet again.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

CERTAIN scholarly men are rising up and tempting us, asking questions which are common to politics, economics, ethics, and spiritual Christianity. We are bound to follow our Master's example, and to welcome their investigations. Earlier phases of materialism and atheism are already discarded. Philanthropists who are not yet

avowed disciples of Christ are looking for a life which will transfigure and survive the miseries they seek to relieve. They are reading what is written in their own hearts as legibly as the law is written in our Scriptures.

We can work with all social reformers, even if their programme is not positively Christian, unless they start another question: Who is my neighbour? This cavil is not always pushed to the front by corporations which need to justify themselves. A distinguished professor in one of our greatest universities defines the State as "all of us," and reduces the question of legal restraints to the accumulation of capital to this: What claim have some of us on all of us? A philosopher exclaims: "Do not tell me, as a good man did to-day, of my obligation to put poor men in good situations. Are they my poor? I tell thee, thou foolish philanthropist, that I grudge every dollar and dime and cent I give to such men as do not belong to me. There is a class

of persons to whom by all spiritual affinities I am bought and sold; for them I will go to prison if need be. But do not talk to me of your miscellaneous popular charities.”

Concede that all this is true, and what bearing has it on our present-day questions? The pauper does not belong to hard-working mechanics; the convicted thief does not belong to the industrious and honest community; the drunkard does not belong to the temperate; who are my neighbours? My family, my friends, my associates and equals in thrift, intelligence, refinement and spiritual affinities; I love my neighbour as myself; but this mob of the illiterate, thriftless and indigent, always going down to Jericho—they are nowhere near me. If the question who is neighbour to me deserves an answer, perhaps this is the best that could be given. But the amazing thing is that such a man as Ralph Waldo Emerson could have started this impertinent question.

Our version leaves the impression

that Christ "answered" the question of the lawyer. But the word literally means "taking up." Christ took up the specious question, flung it away in shame and everlasting contempt, and asked another, which has revolutionised our thinking and set free our imprisoned hopes: Who was neighbour to HIM that fell among the thieves? The question is actually stronger than this. The verb to become is used, not the verb to be. Up to this time all three of the passers-by were strangers to the sufferer. They approached, not "by chance," but by a coincidence, by a "falling together" of things which God had provided for this necessity. And then the question turned around and faced the other way: Which of these ~~three~~ BECAME neighbour to him that fell among thieves? The other question was shameful. The caviller himself is obliged to answer the new question. He said, I say, you say, all the world says, with one of those instinctive first thoughts on which conscience will tolerate no arguing;

—He that showed mercy on him. The voluntary paupers and the inveterate criminals of our times do not belong to us; do we belong to them? They are nowhere near us; can we get near them? We are on the other side; can we get over on their side? And then when we see them bleeding and half dead, will the dollar and dime and cent be given grudgingly? Oh, Emerson, thou high priest of transcendental philosophy, surrounded by Levites of like spiritual affinities, it was not far across the Concord river to a scene which would have made the quality of thy mercy less strained. —

But after all, the traditional interpretation of this parable as the classic text for miscellaneous charities is wholly at fault. Visiting those who are in prison, and catching those who ought to be, are equally remote from its injunctions. Nothing is said here about our obligations to the escaped thieves, and the traveller was not a pauper.

He was so well dressed that his raiment was worth plundering; he had money and jewels worth fighting for, and he was a stalwart fellow who was left half dead because he would not stand and deliver. Even the professor, who has no higher ideal of the nation than a conglomeration of all of us, will not deny that some of us can claim protection from highway robbery. Natural law arms even private citizens with authority, and charges them with the duty to protect and relieve victims of injustice. There are parables enough for almsgiving.—This calls for nothing but justice to self-supporting men pursuing their lawful callings.—When was the call more urgent than now? Where can men go and not fall among thieves? Why are they left half dead, when a little oil and wine and credit at a wayside inn will start them in business once more? Why not run to their rescue before they fall among thieves? Our parable is the searchlight turned on

these tremendous questions of the times, and our first attention must be fixed on its detection of the long procession passing by on the other side.

The ideal theocracy, with a priestly class assisted by their kinsmen, all of them servants and intimate friends of the people, was never realised. In the dark and cloudy days of their history the shepherds no longer healed the sick nor bound up the broken nor brought again that which was driven away nor sought that which was lost, but ruled the people with force and cruelty. The ancient ideal was restored in the ministry of the Apostles and their helpers, and approached fulfilment in the Christian Church under Jewish and Pagan persecution. A slave was often the pastor of a church in the largest house of some neighbourhood, and no other disciple rendered him more reverence and obedience in his sacred office than his own master. Too soon the separation of clergy

and laity began again, lordly functions were assumed by a graded priesthood, and the oppressions of the hierarchy went on until the clerical class got possession of one-third of the land, and tithed and fined the people beyond endurance. The Church passed by on the other side, until a beneficent revolution was seized by the madness of atheism.

Meantime, the patrician ideals of the ancient civilisations, not destitute of good aspirations for service to plebeians, had been lost, and impassable gulfs were opening between them. Nobles were living in distant cities and scarcely ever saw the workmen on their estates. Ladies of the Court frankly expressed doubts whether their serfs were human beings. Royal and baronial classes were passing by on the other side. And the exiles from persecution made it their first care in building a nation on this Continent to divest the Church of all political power, to prohibit for ever all classes of nobility and to guard jealously the

self-evident truth that all men are created free and equal. We supposed that emancipation had eradicated the last traces of these age-long and universal barbarisms. In fact, the unprecedented expansion of profitable business immediately after the Civil War has introduced in a single generation a class distinction in American citizenship, between those who are immensely rich and those who are barely earning a living, which is quite as formidable as the castes which our fathers discarded. And socialists are rising up all over the country and asking us furious questions :—

Is the wage system dividing profits fairly between capital and labour combined in the same business? Can any system be devised which will be fair so long as profits remain as the chief end in view? Colossal corporations have destroyed the balance of power once afforded by competition: is it not high time to displace competition altogether, and to form one corporation of all the people for

mutual benefit, conducted by impartial law? Why should the Civil Government fail to manage telegraphs, telephones, express, freight, and passenger traffic, electric cars, gas, water, and all public services, at least as well as it now manages the Post Office and the common schools? And why should not this control be gradually extended to mining, and to all business which requires enormous capital? Above all, and first of all, why should not the Government assume the management of all the real estate business of the country? The single tax affords the natural remedy for all our distress, so we are told. Out of the accumulations of the richest families, over all possible expenses for luxuries, it is estimated that only four per cent. a year is taken by our present system of taxation, while the revenue absorbs, directly and indirectly, seventy-eight per cent. of the hard savings of the poorest class. The land belongs to all the people as rightfully as air and sunlight. The rapidly-increas-

ing value of city lots has been created by the whole community. Speculators have no right to the unearned increment of vacant land. If all taxes were levied on land values, the burden would be fairly distributed. Why not begin all social reforms with this simple and righteous revision of our constitutions?

These economic questions are very tempting. There are others which touch the Christian conscience to the quick:—

Is our present system of taxation upon industry anything else but legalised robbery? What right have the coal barons of Pennsylvania, and the mining corporations of the West, and the Standard Oil Company, to the richest treasures of this continent stored up by our Father in heaven for the comfort of all His children? This race for enormous wealth was started by fraudulent Army contracts, by floating bond issues while

the life of the nation was at stake, by the sale of shoddy goods, by fictitious inflation of prices, and by all sorts of speculations. Can it be that there is no law and no power in heaven or earth to arrest this aggrandising of estates which are already a menace to civilisation, and to protect working men from confiscation? Our young men are robbed of independent careers. There is scarcely an industry left among us which may not be ruined in a month by corporations earning ten per cent. dividends on stock diluted to half its cost. Can it be that we have abolished slavery and have no resource against those who are saying to free men: Work for us at just what we choose to pay, or we will starve your families to death? Nearly all our great trunk lines of railroads have been built by mortgages on the air; the right of way was purchased for stock which cost the corporation little or nothing; payment was made for construction, mile by mile, as fast as the tracks

were laid, from bonds issued with no collateral security; fictitious dividends were declared by reckoning as legitimate profits the freight paid by construction companies which were only the railroad company under another name; thus the stock was boomed for the final wreck and for the unscrupulous receiver. Can it be that righteous law is incompetent to abolish the borrowing power of corporations which has made beggars of widows and orphans?

These explosive questions of our Socialists are all summed up in one: Twelve millions of American families are falling among thieves; who else are the thieves except the richest class of our citizens, and our municipal, State and national governments, which are paying a bounty on their extortions?

This is a solemn and a very tempting question, but our parable does not answer it, nor even take it up. A revenue system immeasurably worse than ours was in force, and the oppressions of labour were the

cruellest ever exacted, and yet Jesus steadfastly refused to interfere with the things that were Cæsar's. The heart of His gospel in its application to the labour question is in this parable, and its appeal to the richest men is not revolutionary. He only entreats them to take sides with all who are falling among thieves. They protest that their wealth has been gained, not only in strict accordance with common and statute law, but by natural and irresistible tendencies; that every necessity of life has been cheapened by corporations combining enormous capital; that our civil service is already corrupt, and that it would be quite incompetent for vastly extended enterprises; and finally, that the full play of voluntary associations in business, in spite of unavoidable evils, is the best possible system, and that all socialistic schemes will lead straight to anarchy; in short, that men of enormous wealth are not thieves, but honest men, minding their own business. If all this were conceded, it would not touch the

question before us. Our Lord is teaching us how to mind our own business so as to get over on the side of men who are suffering injustice. Is modern business tending in this direction? Some of the greatest and best men in the country have been forced into these trusts, and are making it their business to resist injustice, and to invest their profits for the benefit of their workmen. But what is the actual position of the controllers of our industry as a class?

It is a conceded fact that men of enormous wealth are more widely separated, by the nature of things, from working men than feudal barons were from their serfs. What can a man with a surplus income of a million to reinvest every year know of a family making its deposit of a dollar a month in the savings bank? He may pass that way and look on them. Can he possibly get to them where they are? There is a limit to the long-distance telephone, and

human nature is not capable of working sympathies across such oceans of space. It is the position, not the character, of this rapidly-increasing class of our citizens which separates them from the rest of us. They are not bad men. Nearly all of them profess to be disciples of Christ. The two largest fortunes in real estate belong to families in the Episcopal Church. The greatest manufacturing business is controlled by a deacon of a Baptist Church. Of two railroad investments worth a hundred millions each, one belongs to an adherent of the Presbyterian Church, the other to a member of the Episcopal Church, who is also an earnest worker in Young Men's Christian Associations. Ninety-five per cent. of the richest men in the United States are Protestants. Nobody questions their sincerity or their honest intentions; and yet they are passing by on the other side. There are noble exceptions. But every man among them who is known to be a good Samaritan instantly

becomes the most conspicuous man in America. Nearly all of them are as separate from the people in their pews as in their mansions. With no bad intent, and often against their protests, they are making class distinctions in American churches. We are devising people's churches and institutional churches; we are talking about civic churches; we are training experts to hold the families of working men within reach of the Gospel. The Protestant Church which succeeds in the very thing and the only thing which Christ and the apostles demanded of local churches is a marvellous object in any American city and its minister is a genius. It may be the fault of the people who shrink from contact with the richest families anywhere. The fact is obvious and incontestible: in homes, in clubs, and in churches, the richest and the poorest are separate. Excluding all of us who can be classed with neither, and of course excluding criminals and voluntary paupers, we have one class of ten

thousand families and another of twelve million self-supporting and self-respecting families—two classes divided and diverging.

What are we going to do about it? That question will open another chapter. Let this be closed by a revised version of our parable in modern American language :

A certain man went down from his country home to Chicago, invested all his capital in a manufactory of small wares and fell among—department stores! They ruined him by putting bankrupt stocks of the same goods on the market at half the cost of production. They bought his stock to ruin somebody else with, employed him as salesman, until he fell ill from disappointment and overwork. Then he went to the hospital, and his family went to the poor-house.

A certain man started a small oil refinery in Indiana, and was offered twenty-five per cent. more than cost for his plant as soon as it began to yield good profits. He declined,

simply because he wanted a business of his own. Later he was offered fifty per cent. advance, with a significant hint that this was his last chance. He declined again, and the next time his tanks were full he could neither obtain barrels nor transportation for his product at prices that would save cost. He was ruined, and in due time found his way to the same hospital in Chicago.

A certain man sold his homestead in Vermont and went West to purchase a new farm. He was persuaded to invest his capital in a railroad just completed and paying six per cent. on the stock, with an annual bonus. The dividends were promptly paid and the bonus, and some savings were invested in new blocks of stock offered only to holders of the original. The stock rose from seventy to one hundred and seventeen. Then came the collapse, and he sold out at five, and worried himself into nervous prostration, and was taken to the same hospital in Chicago.

Then by chance a certain preacher

passed through its wards, heard these three stories, and preached a tremendous sermon on the golden rule. A reporter interviewed the three men, and wrote a flaming article with startling headlines. A sensational novel was published in two volumes founded on these outrages. A lawyer called a public meeting which voted ten scathing resolutions and took up a collection for the starving families. And at last a little book was printed about parables telling over again the same tedious stories. Men and brethren! Are we Priests and Levites doing nothing better than this to become neighbours to the really honest and industrious and capable workmen who are falling among thieves all around us?

At last a certain socialist passed that way. He was a German agnostic, and never went to church, but spent most of his Sundays in hospitals. He stormed and raved at the men who had ruined these poor fellows, and denounced them also as fools. Did not they know better than to get

into such dens of robbers? Why didn't they sell out at fifty per cent. profit, or at a hundred and seventeen? And what was the use of trying to do anything for such idiots? Nevertheless, he won their confidence by his gruff sympathies, gave them hope enough to get well on, set them up in a safe business once more, kept them from ever venturing beyond their depth again, and to-day they are content with moderate earnings, and are happy in modest homes. Which of us all, thinkest thou, became neighbour to the men who fell among thieves? Go and do thou likewise.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LABOUR QUESTION: THE RIGHT SIDE; THE GOOD SAMARITAN.—II.

There may come a time when we shall all understand that our tendency to the individual appropriation of gold and broad acres, fine houses, and such good and beautiful things as are equally enjoyable by a multitude, is but a trait of imperfectly developed intelligence. When that day dawns, there will be no more poor in the streets nor need of almshouses.—HAWTHORNE.

WHY did Jesus make a Samaritan the good neighbour of His story? Why did He not select a Samaritan and a Herodian as examples of those who were passing by on the other side, and describe an Israelite without guile who had compassion on the sufferer? A short time before, the disciples proposed to call down fire from heaven to consume certain Samaritans who would not receive their Master, and this alien race was always odious for its heresy. And

yet orthodoxy in the parable is lifted up to bad eminence by reason of its inhumanity, while philanthropy makes heresy almost lovely. How true and how prophetic is the story as it stands! The men who might have saved France from the Revolution were banished for heresy. The Established Church has often been on the wrong side of every reform in England, from Wiclif to John Bright, and all the Churches were late in coming over to the right side of the anti-slavery contest in America. Jesus praises the compassion of a heretic and repudiates the orthodoxy which is oblivious to human misery.

But this reproach has been largely removed. Our Priests and Levites are doing much, and trying to do a thousand things beyond their power, to right the wrongs of working-men. They are preaching an uncompromising gospel to the rich, charging them not to live in ostentation nor to make an idol of their wealth, and entreating them to be mindful of

their stewardship over gifts of God intended for the enjoyment of all His children. And they are not preaching a garbled gospel to the poor—contentment with their lot and thankfulness for charity. They are manfully taking the part of all who suffer injustice. Exceptions prove the rule; the spiritual, as well as the ethical and economic teaching of our times, is thoroughly on the side of the men who are falling among thieves.

Nevertheless, the parable holds good. Priests and Levites are not getting precisely into the place of this good Samaritan. They are in despair because the worst sufferers will not come to church, and they are suspected of perfunctory service when they visit the poor. College professors and reform writers cannot do the exact thing that most needs to be done. In fact, this is not the business of preachers and lecturers and reformers, and they will be sure to bungle it if they lay hold. They are the recruiting officers of the noble

army of good Samaritans. They construct theories of the relation of ethics to economics, collect funds for reforms and organise charities. But neither teaching nor money can do the actual work required. Hired workers are too far off. The labour reform is still in the initial stage, and an enormous disproportion of its work has been assigned to endowments of philanthropic institutions and to public speaking and literature. The men who are going to make the twentieth century glorious by solving the most difficult problem of all the ages are not to be found in pulpits nor in universities. The divinest and most hopeful work of the Gospel has been assigned to men who are trained by experience and not by schools, who are shrewd enough to dodge the thieves, quick enough to catch them, or else stalwart enough to knock them down; they are working men themselves, and by virtue of their environments and habitudes they know better than walking delegates what wage-earners need, and sooner

or later we all trust them and follow their lead.

— Who are our good Samaritans? They are our Christian business men who are content with moderate profits and are seeking first the kingdom of heaven in their business itself.— Luther used to come upon portions of Scripture that made him exclaim: “Aha, this is my Psalm; Galatians is my epistle!” THE GOOD SAMARITAN is your parable, O Christian business men! Does not the personal pronoun quiver in the conscience of every man of you: go and do thou likewise! Make a good use of your wealth is the only appeal men will hear who are on the other side. Make a good use of yourselves is the appeal of your gospel.

And it never calls you away from your work to make a business of philanthropy. The question is not how much time you can take from your business for charity, but how to keep all uncharitableness out of your business, and how to make it all

philanthropy through and through. The good Samaritan was not on an errand to the slums that day—he was on a business trip. You will find all the men you can take care of in the midst of your business. This is not your parable if you have to drop work to hunt after them. Conduct your business so that it will take care of them and yield you fair profits—also. Make bargains which will be just as good for the buyer as for the seller.—Be a good neighbour to the man you employ or to the man who — employs you, while the work is going on. No makeshifts of philanthropy can bring you together if your interests are hostile at the start. How to demolish, root and branch, all business which can make gains only by the losses of others, how to take care of one another all through the competitions and complications of modern business on consolidated capital, how to do business on Christian principle, and how to — make Christian principle rule the business of the world; this is the

exact and the only question of our parable.

—Don't give up because you can't get rid of pernicious systems.—The Samaritan did not chase after the Priest and Levite to curse their temple; nor raise a hue and cry, nor summon a cohort to catch the thieves, nor start for Rome to insist on the suppression of brigandage. His man was half dead, and would be quite dead long before any such ponderous machinery could be started. Profit-sharing, conciliation by arbitration, perpendicular combinations of labour and capital in the same establishments keeping employers and men good neighbours and mutual helpers; instead of horizontal combinations of capitalists on one side and workmen on the other, always in hostile array; work in combinations of small capital as well as supplies provided by co-operative stores; a natural system of taxation which will shift the heaviest burdens from those who receive the least to those who receive

the most from the civil government. Think on all of these things, and approve the more excellent. But constitutions must be amended before the most important of them can be set in force. Listen to the reformers, but stop your ears when anybody tells you that no good can be done until a revolution reverses everything in the political and financial world. That was the temptation of Christ at the beginning of His ministry. His own people were crushed by a military despotism. Roman slavery was making free labour odious, and holding half the population of the capital in the cruellest bondage. Every province was ripe for revolt. Venerable prophecies, well known East and West, looked for the deliverer to come from this peculiar people. It was no preposterous thing to offer supreme power for the righting of these wrongs at a stroke to a young enthusiastic prophet. The wrestling against the temptation cost Jesus the anguish of forty days which was a

— foretaste of Gethsemane, but He refused to be a judge and a divider over men. His kingdom was not of this world. The Devil left Him for a season, but came back when the people were going to take Jesus and make Him a king by force; and again, when Constantine did make Christianity the religion of the Roman empire. The devil is coming back now, when excellent Christian socialists are proclaiming a gospel of the regeneration of society as a whole, in advance of soul-saving labour for individuals. This Satan, savouring not of the things of God but of the things that be of men, must get behind our good Samaritans. The first thing to do for institutions is to get close to men who are down and to help them up one by one; and there is nobody in the wide world who can always do the right thing in the nick of time except a business man who is familiar with all the details of our complicated industries, and has the common-sense to make the least of their evils and the con-

science to control them for righteousness.

No man ever protested more strenuously against monopolies than Charles Kingsley, and yet he declared that, without the change of a single law or feature of the industrial system, if every person in Great Britain who professed and called himself a Christian should live literally according to the precepts and example of Christ, there would not be a man left at the end of twenty-four hours who could keep the upper hand for unrighteousness. Can we live literally according to the example and precepts of Christ? We think of His sinless life and of His miracles of benevolence. But He never commanded us to do these things in His name. We are to follow His footsteps, but He left no footsteps on the sea. There is one section of His life, longer by many years than His public ministry, which business men can follow literally. Jesus was a carpenter and builder from His youth to His

thirtieth year. Why do we know so little of the largest portion of His life on earth? Not because it was less a redeeming life than the three or four years at the end, but because there was nothing miraculous in it. He was doing what everybody can always do. He was wearing a path and working out a rule for the righteous conduct of business for ever. Don't say that His rule will work at home and in church, but is too good for your business. It will not work wickedness, and it will not work at all unless you work it, but it was meant for precisely such business as the carpenter and builder in Nazareth used to carry on. He brings it in where He is teaching His disciples their first steps. By-and-by He is going to make heroes of a few of them, who will love their neighbours a great deal more than they love themselves, and will lay down their lives for their enemies. You could also be trained for martyrdom if that were necessary. But your immediate work is not heroic; become a good

neighbour and love your neighbour as yourself.

After all, the golden rule is nothing but a tolerable and useful selfishness. Every approach to communism makes selfishness the more intolerable by attempting to ignore it. Utopian schemes are always shattered on this rock. Business cannot be done without some study of self-interest. This is one of the forces of human nature which can never be dispensed with. Christ takes it into His rule for doing business. Love and reverence yourself—the only being in the universe for whom you are entirely responsible. Do not fear nor despise your appetites and passions; they are the dark things within you, but the darkness is not necessarily evil. Only keep them from overshadowing conscience; for if the light that is in thee be darkness, then what an awful thing must the DARKNESS be! If conscience is groping blindly, then the involuntary instincts, dark, but also useful, become the blackness of darkness. Keep

these necessary and dangerous forces of your nature under the mastership of the will. Make a duty, not a passion, of your study of self-interest. Make the most and the best of your whole self, and then put your best self in the place of your neighbour. What would he like to have you do for him? That is not the question. What would you like to have him do for you? That is not the question. (You are yourself—going up from Jericho to Jerusalem. He is himself going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. Put yourself as you are now, after a good turn in your character and fortunes, into the place of the other man and do him exactly the good turn you would have him do you.) What would you do if you were just as intelligent and just as scrupulous as you are now, but had been frozen out of business and were supporting your family in a tenement house on a dollar and a half a day? What would you do if you were in character exactly what

you are, and yet had an income of five hundred thousand? Put your best self in the place of everybody you touch, and keep in touch with Christ.

What preposterous talk we hear about the golden rule as an ideal which will not work in business! It never was meant to work in anything else, and nothing else will work in business. Retaliations and strikes and boycotts don't pretend to work. A fight always stops work. This is not a military order, but the rule for non-combatants who stay at home and send on the supplies, and cheer the heroes and martyrs and missionaries who are at the front fighting the good fight. Shame on the man who names the name of Christ, and gives out that he cannot make such an easy rule as this do the unheroic but blessed work assigned to it. It is righteousness reduced to its lowest terms. It is the marshalling of self-interest for the simplest services of God. It is the only way to do business with a splendid

economy of all the forces of human nature.

Take the eighth commandment and the golden rule literally. Take them as categorical imperatives into all details of business, and the moment they clog the machinery take the crash as a danger-signal. Stop short; an enterprise which cannot be carried on with literal obedience to the law of God and the Gospel of Christ is not business.

The golden rule was not intended for heroic work, but its displacement from authority in commercial affairs is an evil which may require a heroic remedy. Young men of scholarly training and of Christian principles may yield unconsciously to the fascination of motives which will murder conscience. They are in danger when they see without a shudder enormous fortunes made by legal protection of fraud. And when they discover in themselves symptoms of mania for sudden wealth, they must renounce this bad ambition

utterly, or else count the cost at the integrity of their souls. They must give up business if its profits are turning their heads. They are honest enough now to become rich, or even to become politicians, and still be safe and useful. They will not be safe a month longer with this delirium mounting to their brains. They must cut off the right hand and pluck out the right eye.

In fact, however, the heroic remedy is almost never needed. There is a good ambition which will overcome the bad. Money-making ought not to be given up by young men who delight in it, unless lust for gain is becoming an infatuation. Enthusiasm for your business and for the blessings it will confer ought to be one of the commanding forces of the Gospel. There are thorough-going Christian men enough in every legitimate business in the world to brand with shame all speculations which by the nature of things can only gain by the loss of rivals. Is it true that the Stock Exchange is a dangerous place for

young men as sensitive in conscience as their mothers and sisters? Then it is an infamous truth. Make it an infamous lie in less than a generation. Widows of clergymen in the Church of England used to send their sons to Samuel Morley's establishment in Wood-street entreating him to train them to his own sense of honour in trade. There was a business firm in Leipsic to which lecturers on ethics in all the universities used to refer, assuring their scholars that it could teach them more than their whole curriculum. A dealer in grain once failed in Buffalo. There was not a lawyer in the city who would undertake to prosecute him. His creditors were obliged to accept his own terms. He toiled for them the rest of his life, paid one hundred cents on the dollar, left his family with small investments, and a name worth more than millions.

Business men are largely responsible for the quality of modern Christianity. It no longer means what

the preachers preach, nor even what the Bible reads in the original. It means exactly what prosperous business men in our churches are doing. They have been content too long to let honesty as the best policy pass for Christian virtue. They can make the whole Gospel ring as true in trade as in the Bible. The rest of us don't know how, and we are not responsible for our ignorance; but if they don't know how, they are responsible for their ignorance. There must be a Gospel way of doing things so useful, so needful, and so manifestly committed to them by the providence of God. They are called to the apostolic work of making business itself the most genuine and the most aggressive agency of modern Christianity.

A few of them have created the ideals which inspire our appeals to them all. We have seen these men of God run their mills at a loss all winter to keep their men from starving, investigate complaints and grant twice as much as was asked if justice

demanded that increase, refuse to discharge non-union men at the peril of a strike in flush times, make colossal sacrifices for principle, and live with the one transcendent ambition to do the greater works which Christ has left for this age in the transcendent promise of His Gospel. Our appeal is for a Christian combination of all men and women of influence in the country under the lead of business men, to work out the labour problem as thoroughly as emancipation solved a simpler but not less difficult problem. Aspirations for Christian unity have thus far scarcely risen above the hope of huddling us together under a common creed and a common church polity. Here is a heavenly kingdom of work which will unite churches and reform clubs in a grand Christian federation.

And the actual leaders of such a movement must be business men. They must cancel from our programme schemes which are Utopian,

lay out work year by year which public opinion will sustain, and educate the people by gradual improvements in operation. We ought to lay hands on a few of the great men now engaged in commerce and prophesy unto them in the name of the Lord, saying : You are rich enough. You have trained younger men to take your place. Leave your plough and sacrifice your oxen on the altar. Never make another dollar. Give away something better than your money. Give yourself, your mind, your sagacity, your experience, and above all the talents which have sustained your enthusiasm in doing good by means of your own business, and show us how to organise the business of the whole country for doing good. Capitalise your fortune, your time, your ambition, and your best inspirations, for this one grand enterprise. Command the masters of statistics, the scholars in economics and ethics, and all the specialists in reform, and give their figures and

facts and theories a practical turn. Have faith in God that mountains can be moved, and by patient undermining, and then by explosions, if need be, move them out of the way of righteousness and peace. You are our pre-destined leaders in three enterprises of a working Christian unity : in making business an inspired Christian calling, in doing business on Christian principles, and in using business for the aggressive work of the Gospel.

A man who had risen from the ranks of wage-earners began, about thirteen years ago, to teach the working men in his manufactory how to make self-interest reach to the point of honour. He set the limit to his own profits at six per cent. on the capital invested. He reserved ten per cent. of the profits to meet losses in bad years, and five per cent. more as a provident fund for the sick, and for widows and orphans of men dying in his service. All that was left he distributed at the rate of two dollars added to the men's wages for every

one dollar added to the capital as surplus. Already capital has increased so that new factories have been erected, surrounded by co-operative stores, schools, lecture-halls, and library for the benefit of the community. Hundreds of the men are stock-holders in the company, and are purchasing their own picturesque homes by instalments. They all understand that they are cheating not only their associates but themselves if they fail to do their best, and they share the enthusiasm of their devoted leader.

In 1892 a few neighbouring farmers in Ireland were persuaded to build and equip a creamery. Others followed in rapid succession. In three years the losses from bad debts and litigation were made good, and profits were increasing. Societies became so numerous that agencies for the sale of their products were established in every large town in England. They extended their work to all branches of farming, and in 1896 they had eight thousand seven

hundred and fifty shareholders, and in one year they put goods on the market worth nearly a million and a half dollars. The land of evictions and famines which was the most backward in Europe ten years ago is farthest advanced to-day towards the righteous use of the soil for the benefit of its cultivators. And one of the youngest members of the English Parliament has been the indefatigable leader in the work of making self-help for the sake of helping each other a kingdom of heaven on Irish soil.

Many similar experiments have failed, and have been abandoned. The Irish experiment failed for two years, and was not abandoned. No man is fit to be a leader who is daunted by failure. We are a people of inventive genius, and of prodigious energy, and ours is a continent of boundless resources. This is the spot, and the hour has struck for a permanent solution of the labour problem. We only lack the leaders. We are waiting in

distress and in suspense for missionary work by business apostles.

The value of personal services in these directions by experienced business men is beyond all possible computation. Suppose that a new Peter the Hermit should arise, take the signal-call to disarm which has just been sounded for his text, and preach a crusade for peaceful industry to celebrate the new century! Suppose all the churches and clubs and newspapers in our land should take up the watchword with enthusiasm! Suppose it should assume this simple form, all of us who have an income of more than twenty-five hundred dollars agree to give away all our savings during the year 1901! Not a dollar is to be taken from invested capital; annual expenses are not to be diminished; taxes and all benevolent contributions are to be deducted from the income as usual. Then whatever is left shall be given solid for the Jubilee. We agree not to grow any richer for twelve months,

and to make that year blaze among the centuries by one magnificent endowment of philanthropy. No man can compute what the amount would be. In 1880 it would have been one thousand millions; fifteen hundred millions would be a moderate estimate of the great thanksgiving offering of 1901. Now suppose it could be handled without corruption and be devoted to the building and endowment of industrial schools fairly distributed all over the country and conducted for the greatest possible benefit. This vast benevolence would not count a feather's weight compared with the personal services of all the business men who profess to be Christians, if they would do all their business in exact conformity to this parable.

Neither money nor prophecy can do the work of the good Samaritan. There is not a preacher nor a scholar in the world who can give such speed to the coming of the kingdom of heaven as any business man who will do all his work by the golden rule,

make his ledgers liturgies, and his cash books collects for every day, stamp his money with the image of God while he is earning it, and so make it current in the kingdom of heaven.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PROBLEM OF CHRISTIAN OPTIMISM : THE DIFFICULTY ; THE TARES.—I.

Cruelty has a human heart,
And jealousy a human face ;
Terror the human form divine,
And secrecy the human dress.
The human dress is forged iron,
The human form a fiery forge,
The human face a furnace sealed,
The human heart its hungry gorge.
WILLIAM BLAKE.

WHY has this parable received and retained its ominous title ? It might well be called the parable of planting men. It takes up the parable of sowing the truth where its abundant harvest has gathered the children of the kingdom, and goes on to tell us what becomes of them. Are they fully ripe for the enjoyment of heaven, and taken home to be for ever with the Lord ? They are

planted again as good seed for another harvest. Their heaven is not yet a heavenly rest. The men who were called into the house to listen to Christ's interpretation of this great missionary parable were not removed from the scene of His sufferings and resurrection until the harvest of thousands was gathered in. Then they were sown again, broadcast, all over the world, every man where his growth would be most productive.

There was not a scholar among them yet. The man of classic and rabbinical learning would be ready and full-grown in the knowledge of Christ by the time he would be needed in the synagogues of the dispersion, among the Stoics and Epicureans of Athens and in the Imperial capital. He was so eager to open new plantations in Spain that he had to be chained to one after another of the Prætorian guards, who could do his missionary work more effectually and far more widely.

This parable is the unrolled chart

of Christian history. Seed-time is known only to the Divine sower, and He always has the right seed ready for every soil. Why was the settlement of this continent delayed for more than a century? The men were not born who could be the children of such a kingdom as God intended to plant in the new world. They were ready at last, and were blown over the winter's sea to a coast too barren to produce any other luxury than men and women of godly sincerity and dauntless resolution. Why was not slavery gradually abolished as Washington and Jefferson advised and expected? A harvest of heroic men must first be planted and gathered. One of them who was endowed by nature with brilliant gifts received also one talent in his childhood; he heard Lyman Beecher preach a sermon which kept ringing the changes on the truth—you belong to God. He went home and offered this prayer: I belong to Thee, O God; take what is Thine own and vouchsafe that whenever anything be

wrong it may have no power to tempt me, and whenever anything be right it may take no courage to do it. Long afterwards the answer came. He was sitting in his office, as oblivious to his heavenly calling as Saul of Tarsus on his journey to Damascus, when he saw a gentleman led by a rope in a mob who could scarcely be restrained from murdering him. In Faneuil Hall he heard the Attorney General of the Commonwealth defend the murderers of Lovejoy. The Spirit of the Lord came upon him, he sprang to his feet, and from that hour for more than thirty years, until slavery was abolished and every trace of its venom was removed from the constitution, he was the inflamed conscience and the persuasive power of the greatest reform in American history.

Wendell Philips would have ruined the cause he loved and won if he had been planted anywhere else than on the platform, where his matchless eloquence silenced and carried by storm tumultuous multitudes. A

very different man was needed in a more conspicuous position. Convinced that slavery was wrong and must not be extended, that secession, whether proposed by Abolitionists or threatened by slaveholding States, would be a still greater crime, he was planted where he could wait for public opinion to sustain him in proclaiming and enforcing emancipation to save and not to destroy the Union.

The Divine Husbandman makes no mistakes in planting His men. Has He planted you in a hard place? Is it worse than the pandemonium of all iniquity in Pagan Rome? The flowers we now behold growing out of the ruined palace of the Cæsars are a faint emblem of the virtues of Christian slaves who were saints in Nero's household. Never say you cannot be a faithful Christian on the stock-board. You cannot be entirely obedient to your heavenly calling anywhere else. That is the strategic position in the next battle for righteousness in England and in America. You belong to God, who has given

you the talent to make Christian principle the rule of business, and has commanded you to stand there in His name. Reverence yourself as the good seed of His kingdom. Then trickery will be no temptation, and fair dealing will require no courage. In a free land where public schools are open, where newspapers are circulating and where church bells are ringing, public opinion is not going to tolerate any flagrant sin very long. The people can be trusted to enforce righteousness as soon as they know how. You are making their ignorance more dense by every compromise with fraud. You are opening their eyes every time you take your stand, alone if need be, for justice. That is what a Christian is for. And we are all planted where our several scruples are specially needed.

But the seed must fall into the ground and die before its hidden germ can multiply a hundredfold. Paul counted all things but loss for

the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. Savonarola forsook his aristocratic home to become a teacher of novices, and persisted in his denunciations of corruption when he knew that his life must be the forfeit. Wendell Phillips was ostracised and resigned a profession which was promising speedy wealth and power, and even after the success of his agitation had made him famous, refused to be governor or senator in order to be untrammelled in his services for the temperance and the labour reforms. No man can come after Christ who refuses to take up his cross. You must lose your life to save it. The eternal vitality for righteousness within you must be a resurrection from the grave where you are buried with Christ. The teacher must be dead to his own emoluments and alive to the truth ; the statesman must be dead to personal ambition and alive to the service of his country ; the business man must be dead to covetousness and alive to integrity in trade. Then

they are children of the kingdom. No other seed will redeem the purchased field from waste. The world will not read the Bible, but they will always read the men who live up to it. Into a limitless fallowfield of men desperately unscrupulous you fall with a conscience purged from dead works to serve the living God; they feel the throbbing of Christ's spirit in you and spring up to a ransomed and reinvigorated life.

But, bright as this outlook is, we must turn to the dark feature of the parable to discover the true basis for Christian optimism. Christ's promise that the planting of good men shall never be frustrated by the planting of the wicked among them is the most far-reaching prediction of the Gospel. The tares, not the wheat, have made Christian history and have headed its chapters with ominous titles.

The best life of men and of nations is uneventful. This story is only just begun, when a wicked deed

diverts its peaceful current and absorbs our interest in the dreadful calamity.

But it does not destroy the ideal. The kingdom of heaven is not like sowing tares, but always like sowing good seed. The change observed in a former parable is also made in this, only now the verb has the historic tense : the kingdom of heaven **BECAME** like the two sowings in its progress. This is a startling feature of every period of Christian history, and it has adhered to the very title of its great prophetic parable.

Who are the tares? Our Lord's interpretation is perfectly clear ; and yet this parable has been involved in one of the most interminable controversies of Christian literature :—

What is the church of God? The body of Christ, holy and without blemish, with many members, who are all sanctified in Christ Jesus, effectually called and made partakers of the Divine nature. On these scriptures strict Puritans of all ages have taken their stand, and have

protested that the church is a communion of saints, and consists of all those, and of those only, who are truly regenerate in heart. The Lord knoweth them that are His, and they know one another, not by their uniform, but by the recognition of mutual love, which shall become perfect when they are arrayed in the white robes, and when God shall spread His tabernacle over them, and wipe away the blinding tears from their eyes.

A very different definition of the Church has been given from early times. The ideal exists only in heaven. In this world neither the family, nor the church, nor the civil government can be patterned after the city of God. The Church is a working organisation of fallible men. It must always be like the net which gathers the bad with the good. It is like the church in Corinth—quarrelling, boastful, and sometimes intemperate in its love-feasts; it is like the churches in Galatia, falling from grace to slavish ordinances; and like

the church in Colossæ, bewildered by fanaticisms ; in short, it is like a field, growing tares and wheat, which cannot be separated until the harvest. Taking their stand on these descriptions, High Churchmen have maintained that the Church consists of all who have been baptised with water into the name of the Holy Trinity, and that its unregenerate members must be converted after baptism and be trained as beloved children of one holy family in Christ Jesus.

After all, this is a controversy of purism, not of puritanism, and might be passed without mention if this parable had not been dragged into it. Such an interpretation is expressly excluded by one startling fact : the tares must be left to grow as they are until the harvest ! Would any church, Catholic or Protestant, Ritualistic or Puritan, dare to leave its unconverted members as they are until the judgment ? Are they honest inquirers, seeking to know

what they must do to be saved, and only needing the nurture and admonition of the Church to become in heart and life saints of God? Then they are not the tares. Are they wandering children, sometimes overcome by flagrant sins and needing rebukes and discipline to lead them to repentance? Then they are not the tares. Are they precisely what they were before their baptism, unbelieving and impenitent men, some devout and easily moved to contrition, others hardened in wickedness, but all equally outside of the true Church of Christ? Then they are not the tares. What are they? They are the world. Here is the exact word to describe them in the parable itself. It is our grief and shame that we cannot get access to the world. Here is a little world that has got access to us. We also were the world once. What if the Church had left us to grow as we were until the harvest! We must never let any man alone if we can reach him, least of all the men who come to receive our word

and sacraments. The Puritans tried in vain to read men's hearts and to determine by discipline who were God's elect. Sacraments are invoked in vain to make a wicked man a member of Christ's living body. But this sweet and awful parable, at least, must be left out of our controversies. These adherents, making our local church organisations to the end of time mixed multitudes, are not the devil's tares, but the Christian world planted for a glorious harvest.

Then who are the tares, the children of the wicked one? The only deleterious species belonging to the gramineous plants is the *lolium temulentum*, the *lolium infelix*, the bearded darnel still found in the Orient. It is a kind of degenerate wheat, which cannot be distinguished from the wholesome grain while it is growing. This falls in so well with the story that naturalists have identified the tares with these darnels. Why may they not be removed while

they are growing? Not because their roots are so united to the wheat that both would come up together. That danger would forbid weeding gardens at all, and may be avoided with care. Only because the most painstaking husbandman cannot yet tell tares from wheat. Sprout, and stalk, and blossoms look exactly like wheat.

This brings out more clearly the distinction between the children of the wicked one, and the worldly element in the Church. It is precisely while the Church and the world are growing together that they can be distinguished. We cannot read the heart, but conduct is always legible, and if a man is overtaken in a fault we must restore such an one in the spirit of meekness. They who are spiritual must count the worldly to be brethren, and deal with their trespasses delicately, and be agreed as touching this thing they ask that they may save them within the Church. And even if they must be cast out, and become as the heathen and the publican, then

their brethren must begin over again, and become, like their master, ardent friends of the publicans and sinners. Church discipline, from its first step of loving exhortation between man and man to the last extremity, must be conducted while the spiritual are growing with the worldly; it does not root up, but cultivates wholesome growths of the spirit, and it is the only possible salvation for the worldly.

But among the children of the kingdom so closely united with this worldly yet hopeful element, the enemy has planted the children of the wicked, and no mortal man can discover them! The parable expressly forbids all attempts to detect and exclude them. Wilt Thou that we go and gather them out? That has been the fatal mistake of the Church in all ages. Never was more conscientious work done than Catholic persecution of Waldensians, Calvin's condemnation of Servetus, and Puritan execution of Quakers. Wheat always burns with tares when

the zeal of men intrudes upon the awful prerogative of God.

Our question must be changed. WHAT are the tares? We are forbidden to ask who they are, but the duty becomes all the more imperative to recognise the evil principle which is described in this parable and in the prophetic writings of the Apostles. There is a LEAVEN of malice and wickedness in the Church; it is a mystery of iniquity already at work; in those who believe a lie, and who will not receive the love of truth, there is a fermentation of powers and signs and lying wonders, with all deceivableness of unrighteousness; the danger becomes so appalling that it is ascribed to one human Antichrist, but this error is corrected by the assurance that there are many Antichrists; at last the Apocalypse, still without identifying them with individuals who have ever appeared in history, fully describes successive judgments upon the wicked one and his children until the final separation.

For tares may grow with wheat, and do no greater harm than to cumber the ground. But the ripe grains of the two must never be harvested together. The tares produce a grain which mixed with wheat makes bread stimulating, but never nourishing, and if the bad proportion be excessive the whole loaf will be intoxicating and poisonous. The enemy has no expectation that men will gather and eat unmixed tares. He sows with sparing hand over the best fields of wheat, so as to mingle just enough and not too much of the poisonous stuff to spoil all their bread and to throw them into fatal excitement while they think they are taking wholesome nourishment.

The tares are all things that offend. The embezzlements which are sometimes traced to church-members cause the little ones to tremble, not to stumble. The newspapers are eager to expose the inconsistencies of Christians. It would be a calamity if this criticism were less severe.

Trembling prevents stumbling. The things that actually offend are the iniquities which are so hidden under the disguise of piety that neither the Church nor the world suspect their presence. If they were not cast out by the judgment of God they would become an ingredient of the entire product of Christianity. Thus this evil is a great deal worse than worldliness in the Church ; it is in the Church and in the whole kingdom of God. It is the worst thing in the world ; it makes religion itself immoral.

Here is the difficulty in the problem of Christian optimism. It surpasses immeasurably the difficulty in the problem of evil. Serious as the latter is to philosophy, Christian faith finds relief in the truth of redemption. But the immediate difficulty before the Christian optimist is the indistinguishable mixture of fathomless wickedness with all remedial agencies in the very kingdom of redemption. And when

we reflect that this hidden iniquity has always leavened Christianity, that it cannot be detected by men, and that Christ prohibits all attempts to trace it to individuals, then we must look for the solution of the difficulty to this one promise of the parable that the tares shall be separated from the wheat at the end of the world.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PROBLEM OF CHRISTIAN OPTIMISM : THE SOLUTION ;

THE TARES.—II.

The day of the Lord as the prophet saw it, the coming of the Son of Man, is the revelation of light and a judgment of righteousness. It is not an event, it is a crisis. It is not retired to a remote past. It is not adjourned to a more remote future. It is not merely an event in the sequence of affairs, it is a judgment with the discrimination of good and evil and the issue of righteousness. It is not of one day or one age alone ; it is here and now. This judgment in the distinction and manifestation of righteousness and wickedness, is real and ethical and eternal.—MULFORD.

CHRISTIAN optimism rests absolutely upon Christ's promise to separate hidden iniquity from righteousness at the end of the world. But what basis for optimism would this promise afford, in our present condition, if the end of the world means the judgment after death ? This is certainly the im-

pression which the English Bible gives : the field is the world—the harvest is the end of the world. No reader of either version, the old or the revised, without marginal notes, would suspect that an entirely different word is used in the latter clause. It means a period, and no farther back than in the previous parable it meant—the cares of—THIS LIFE-TIME. It always requires the preposition UNTO or a compound, THE AGE OF THE AGES, to make it mean eternity. Standing alone it describes a period which can only be defined by the context. In other scriptures there may be some difficulty in deciding how long the period may last. But the parable of the tares assigns a definite time : until they are ripe for the harvest. The toleration of wickedness mixed with righteousness so perniciously that they seem to mean one thing cannot last very long. The winding-up, the settlement, or the consummation of the age, must mean here the termination of a brief period of devilish deceptions. The Lord know-

eth when His own can be no longer safely left in an indistinguishable mass with the children of the wicked one. And the harvest of the tares must mean the swift and frequent ripening of hidden iniquity for the burning of God's wrath against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who are SMOTHERING the truth in unrighteousness. The Son of Man shall send forth His angels to gather out of His kingdom all things that offend and the workers of iniquity. The angels may be ministers of the churches, whose denunciations of hidden iniquities become awful judgments of God. Invading hordes from the North were recognised as the scourge of God upon the corruptions of the Church of Rome. Revolutions have always furnished ministers of Divine retribution. And we know not what unseen guardians are looking up into the face of God and imploring Him to come to the rescue of His little ones. The signal is given at last. The man of sin, the son of perdition, who

has been so long opposing himself and exalting himself and sitting in the temple of God and deceiving the very elect, is revealed and destroyed by the sword that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord. This is always a day of judgment, and its separations of the children of the kingdom from the children of the wicked one are made by the searching truth of the Gospel.

If this interpretation be true, it forbids both Christian pessimism and sentimental optimism. The former teaches that the world must grow worse and worse, that the Church has no call to reform the world, that the quality of Christianity must always be adulterated, and that only the elect are to be gathered out to meet the Lord at His final coming in judgment. The latter teaches, or, at least, leaves it to be inferred, that the Church and the world are good enough as they are. This is the worse heresy of the two. But both are escaped by reading

accurately this prediction of a series of merciful judgments frequently recurring, each one demolishing some hidden wickedness and beginning a new dispensation of righteousness.

These judgments may be either spiritual siftings of the kingdom, or providential retributions upon the world, and both are often combined. It was a day of judgment when the Lord said to the twelve: One of you shall betray Me. They remembered His word, Judge not lest ye be judged, and every one of them exclaimed, Lord, is it I? That was not too late for mercy to Judas Iscariot himself. Every repetition of that Supper is a merciful day of judgment. We also shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord if we eat and drink unworthily. At the last moment conscience may be inflamed, we may pronounce judgment on our own sins, be chastened of the Lord in discerning His broken body, and be saved from the condemnation of the world.

The preaching of the Gospel

with uncompromising severity always brings a merciful day of judgment. In that awful day, when Peter's sermon hurled God's judgments upon his whole apostate nation, the murderers of Jesus were the most thankful of all who repented. The mystery of the Gospel surpasses all possible symbolism of nature, for tares may escape the burning and become the choicest wheat. We must never point out others, or even suspect them to be among the tares, but we may sharpen our judgment of ourselves without despair, even to the extent of fearing that we are among the children of the wicked. There is no sin unto death, except hardening the heart against God's forgiving love. Our days of judgment are His imploring calls of love. Strive to enter in by the strait gate before it is too late. For many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able after that the Master of the house hath risen up and shut the door. It will be too late then to plead: "We used to eat and drink in Thy presence, and Thou

hast taught in our streets." True ; and it was that teaching and their eating and drinking at His table which were intended for merciful judgments, to save them from final condemnation.

But the parable points to more signal days of judgment than these individual searchings of heart. Not less frequent are the providential judgments which suddenly clear the atmosphere of the malaria of hypocrisy. It was a judgment and a complete obliteration of Jewish Phariseeism as an adulteration of God's truth when Jerusalem and its Temple were destroyed. Not a parable nor a disclosure of Christ's final coming fails to borrow a warning from that impending disaster. There are living men who can remember when ministers of the Gospel were publicly proclaiming that their only rule of duty was to preach what the brotherhood who employed them would allow and protect; that American slavery was a Bible institution; that there are occasions when the golden rule may be set

aside, and that it actually justified slavery with sufficient safeguards for humane treatment. Was there ever any danger that these apologies in the North would combine with the cruelties of the South and make the whole product of American Christianity an intoxicating mixture, and that this generation would go to their graves reeling with the drunkenness of these casuistries? Not the least danger. This deceivableness of unrighteousness received its judgment in a furnace of fire and in a wailing and gnashing of teeth which can never be forgotten.

The nearness of impending judgments is not betokened so much by the excess of wickedness as by the apathy of those who have no hand in it, or by their unconscious complicity with it. Our familiar saying, iniquity ripening for judgment, is scriptural if it be interpreted by this parable. Iniquity is ripe, not because it is worse than ever before, and too bad to be suffered longer, but because it

is mature in its deceivableness, and will become a fatal ingredient of religion if it remains. The awe of the thoughtless multitudes for pretentious sanctity was far more dangerous than the worst sins of the Pharisees. The Roman Church had survived greater crimes than those of the Popes deposed at Constance. But that Council professed to be reforming the Church in head and members. Its bigotry and persecution could not be left to pass as THE Reformation. The clergy of France could have prevented the bloody reaction of the Revolution, if they had united for reform in 1789. They would not follow their wisest bishops and priests, and suffered the Church to be identified with oppression. The judgments of God fall when wickedness is ripe for a fatal harvest, which would poison all goodness.

And this is the danger-signal of our own times. On the whole, they are the best times of all history. We have now surveyed some of their

worst evils, and, after all, these are nothing like so bad as the sins which Jesus rebuked in His parables. Compared with the dark ages in the past our century is almost glorious. And its last years are full of promise. But they are also ominous years. They betoken swiftly approaching judgments which must begin at the house of God. The churches are not sensitive to the evils of the times, and they are not giving the keynote to the song of progress. Science is in advance of religion in social reform. The labour reform stands now, as emancipation stood from 1850 to 1860, in a position of acknowledged peril. And yet it is the economic and the political, rather than the ethical, question, which receives thorough discussion. Shortening the hours of a day's work, the exclusion of children of tender age from factories, official investigations of tenement houses in cities, and sanitary measures everywhere, are making constant advances. But how

little the churches have to say from pulpit and press of the wickedness of conditions in business which make the withdrawal of children from school and of their mothers from home absolutely necessary in many families! The axe must be laid at the root of the evil. And if the judgment of God is not enforced upon conscience by His witnesses in the churches, it must fall in calamities.

The dangers of war are alarming the armed nations of Europe. Destructive machinery is expected to make war impossible. The monarch who maintains the most formidable army in the world is imploring the other great powers to join him in disarming. And this is the moment when the only great nation which has never had a standing army at all is proposing to create immense fleets and armies. Objections are made because of the enormous expenditures, and of the danger of reversing our policy. But who is crying out against the essential

wickedness of war? A few newspapers are taking this risk of unpopularity. But our churches have never borne adequate testimony against the worst survival of barbarism, and some of their ministers are apologising for the evil as a necessity. War will soon become its own punishment, if its wickedness is not put away by repentance.

But the most alarming complicity of the churches with the evils of our times is to be found in the attitude of some of them towards monopolies. Church members, who control them, seldom hear rebukes from the pulpit, and sometimes read apologies for their conduct in denominational organs. Intemperate attacks are deprecated when they are aimed at corporations in the hands of men of excellent character who honour their religious obligations and contribute without stint to the noblest charities. There may be differences of opinion about trusts, and their influence is a proper subject of discussion. But one of them

is controlled by men whose Christian character ought not to be called in question. They are always present at prayer-meetings and take prominent parts in the service; they dress plainly, have pleasant words for all the brethren, and set examples which might well be followed in all the churches. Not a word is said in denial of the charge that the corporation has managed, by utter unscrupulousness and by the use of vast capital, to control every producer and every carrier, to say nothing of legislatures and courts. But the private virtues of the men are deliberately balanced against the crushing weight of the corporation. Sometimes a disguised defence of trusts appears, as if they were a dispensation of Providence. In an address to an Endeavour society a missionary agent once set forth the urgent needs of his cause, announced that a large sum was offered on condition that the same amount should be made up from small gifts by a certain date, and

then he went on to say that this munificent giver was once a poor man, but that he was raised up by a special providence for this crisis. And quite unconscious of any danger to the young men who were listening, he described the special providence in detail. It was one of the most underhand speculations ever reported.

Another missionary society was rescued from debt by a single gift, on similar conditions, of six hundred thousand dollars. The papers published a report, which is incredible, but was never denied, that the giver had an income that year of twenty millions. In the outburst, from pulpit, platform, and press, of devout thankfulness for this providential intervention, it was left to a secular paper to quote the text, "I hate robbery for burnt offering."

If it is coming to this, that the injustice by which enormous incomes are secured shall be ignored or even defended by the recipients of gifts and endowments for education and

religion, then the abomination of desolation is getting once more into the holy place, and the day of judgment must be at hand. The responsibility for vindicating the truth, and for destroying the adulteration of it, is never left altogether in the hands of men. Once, before every means of averting calamity was exhausted, slavery was proved to be unprofitable by facts as conspicuous then as they are now, and all sorts of compromises were pledged. At last religion became a bad mixture, and the judgment fell. Similar compromises are now proposed. Scientific researches prove that the present process is running swiftly towards the ruin of all business enterprises. But the day of judgment will not come unless there be a falling away first of the true witnesses, and unless the man of sin contrive to sit in the temple and to be worshipped. The next revolution, if it must come, will put an end to compromises of religion with extortion, and will array all the

forces of righteousness against public robbery.

Christian optimists will always pray for deliverance from these judgments. Only one deliverance is possible: the judgment of the public conscience intercepting Divine retribution. There may be some standing among us who shall not see death until war and all oppression shall be discarded with shuddering horror. But if they ever behold this coming of the Son of Man they will first see repentance on the grandest scale, or else woes which will cast the darkest shadow that ever obscured the map of the world.

Our best hopes for the future are fixed on the conjunction of these two safeguards of righteousness—the frequent judgments of God, and the enlightenment of conscience. To escape the former we only need a combination of all good men, who believe that the ruling hand belongs to Righteousness. They must stake everything on this issue, and prefer

defeat to compromise. They must not lose heart, but

. . . learn to scorn the praise of men
And learn to lose with God ;
For Jesus won the world through shame,
And beckons us His road.
For right is right since God is God,
And right the day must win ;
To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin.

Pessimism is perilously near to Atheism. Our Heavenly Father loves His children too well to let them live long on poisoned bread. He loves best to give them enthusiasm to cast out for themselves and for their own times the old leaven of malice and wickedness. But He never leaves to them the final responsibility for the quality of Christianity. His days of judgment come suddenly upon hidden iniquity when it is no longer tolerable. The worst times are not dangerous times to live in, if righteousness is flashing keen out of their darkness.

The interpretation of this parable, which puts off until death and the

judgment of a future world the separation of wickedness from righteousness, would make apostates and deserters of the noblest soldiers of the Cross. They must endure as seeing Him who is invisible :—

Truth for ever on the scaffold,
Wrong for ever on the throne ;
Yet that scaffold sways the future ;
And behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadow,
Keeping watch above His own.

Keeping watch, and also swiftly coming. There is no need of heavenly surroundings to betoken His presence. His quickening spirit makes every devoted life radiant. If we look not on things seen, but on things not seen and eternal, we behold around the whole horizon the reddening dawn of the day when the righteous shall shine as the sun in the Kingdom of the Father.

THE END.

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